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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE NIHILIST'S SECOND MOVE

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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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THE NIHILISTS' SECOND MOVE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Timely Interference.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DYNAMITE OUTRAGE.

It was shortly after five o'clock in the afternoon.

Nick Carter's automobile came swiftly along the street and drew up at the curb in front of his house, where he leaped to the pavement the moment it came to a stop.

Just as he alighted a deafening explosion which seemed to shake the earth sounded from beneath the stoop that fronted his residence, and in an instant the air around him was filled with broken stones and plaster and bits of iron and dust while the detective himself was hurled backward toward his machine almost in the arms of Danny, his chauffeur, who had alighted immediately after him.

It was a remarkable circumstance that in the midst of that hurtling chaos of wreckage both the men should have escaped injury, for the automobile was wrecked, the pavement in front of them was torn up, the steps and front of the building were entirely demolished, and one-half at least of the front wall of the basement was torn away, leaving a gaping hole in the building through which a team of horses might have been driven.

Windows in many houses along that side of the street and in two or three that were directly opposite were shattered into fragments, and the ground around the neighborhood heaved and shook as if in the throes of an earthquake.

It was the concussion in the air that hurled the detective backward into Danny's arms, and both would have fallen to the pavement together but for the fact that they staggered backward against the front seat of the motor-car.

The rear of the tonneau was torn into splinters; the hood of the machine, over the engine, and the engine itself was smashed into a confused heap of scrap-iron and the big Peerless was out of commission forever; injured beyond repair.

The first consequence of being in the midst of an explosion like that one and escaping uninjured, is utter paralyzation of the mental faculties for a second or a few seconds, or a minute, depending largely upon the character of the man who is affected by it.

The deafening report, the flying pieces of stone torn from the steps and the walls of the building, the dust, and the general chaos that surrounded Nick Carter cer-

tainly had this effect upon him for a very short period of time, and then he released himself from Danny's grasp, for the lad had wound his arms tightly around his chief as if to protect him and himself at the same time, and he straightened up and smiled grimly at the scene of havoc and destruction that now confronted him.

From where he stood he could see plainly into the front basement of his own house, and, indeed, into the parlor thereof, also, for the front wall was torn away a little above that floor.

Of course people came running into the avenue from houses on both sides of it, and thousands of others appeared as if by magic from side streets, running toward the scene of the wreck, until within a lapse of time which seems incredibly small the avenue was crowded from curb to curb by people who had been drawn thither by the sound of the explosion and by the shaking of the earth which had resulted from it. Fortunately there were two policemen among these first arrivals, and these were speedily followed by others, and they all recognized at once that it was Nick Carter's house that had been attacked, and so formed a cordon around the ruined front of it to keep the crowd at a distance.

The frightened face of Joseph appeared at the front door, now innocent of an adequate approach; Patsy came running from somewhere in the interior of the house and took a flying leap from the door to the pavement at the imminent risk of broken legs, so that he might stand beside his chief in any danger that might follow. Ten-Ichi peered from one of the shattered windows on the top floor, and Chick stepped forward from inside the house and stood beside Joseph, coolly looking out upon the scene.

All this was not a very pleasant reception for the detective, after an absence of two days from the city, as happened to be the case.

Once before in his life he had experienced an incident almost identical with this one, but it was so many years ago that he had almost forgotten it.

As soon as Nick Carter could think calmly, after that first paralyzing effect of the shock, he believed that he understood the circumstances exactly, for it was only recently that he had closed out an unusual case in which two of the most renowned of the Russian terrorists and nihilists had been concerned—Ivan Dovanief and his coadjutor and sympathizer, Prince Michael Orloff.

With these two had been arrested and consigned to prison to await trial the wife and daughter of Dovanief, the latter of these two, although young and beautiful, having already earned a reputation second to none for her abilities as a sympathizer with the nihilistic cause.*

Following upon the arrest of these four, who had, of course, been conducted to prison and against whom charges were made, the detective had been called away out of the city for two days, as has been already mentioned.

But the instant that he could think consecutively after the shock of the explosion was past, he attributed the entire incident to the arrest of Dovanief and his sympathizers.

It is true that his first thought charged them with this outrage, but in order to have been guilty personally of the affair, one or more of them must have already escaped from confinement or have been released on bail, and this latter he regarded as unlikely, because of the seriousness of the charges against them; Dovanief and Prince Michael had been charged directly with murder, and the two women of being accessories after the fact.

The regular policeman on that beat was the first of the uniformed officers to arrive, and he stepped forward quickly toward the detective while the others busied themselves in keeping the crowd as far back from the scene of the outrage as possible.

"What has happened, Mr. Carter?" he demanded, with some excitement; and Nick smilingly waved his hand toward the wrecked front of his house as he replied:

"I don't think you need to ask, Collins; look for yourself."

"Dynamite?" asked the officer.

"Looks like it," said Nick.

"Anybody hurt?"

"I think not."

"How did it happen?"

"I expect, Collins, that you know just about as much about that as I do. It happened, I suppose, by the placing of several sticks of dynamite in the area under my front stoop, and it was timed somehow to explode just after I arrived home after an absence of two days. I can tell you this, Collins, if that explosion had occurred two seconds later, it would have blown me into kingdom come."

The policeman shrugged his shoulders and gritted his teeth, then he shook himself as one recovering from a mental nightmare, and was about to ask another question, when the detective suddenly left his side, and, hastening forward a few steps, bent over and picked up the end of a twisted wire from among the débris. Then he motioned, and the policeman approached him.

"This is how it happened," he said.

"What do you mean, Mr. Carter?" asked the policeman.

"I mean," replied the detective, "that the dynamite was set off with an electric battery just as it's done in mines and tunnels, and that the miscreant who did it simply waited across the street or at a safe distance away at the other end of the wire for my approach."

The policeman turned pale.

"It's a terrible thing to think of," he said, "how near you came to being killed, Mr. Carter."

*See No. 559 of THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Beautiful Anarchist."

"Oh, no," replied Nick. "It's a pleasant thing to think that I escaped it. You see, Collins, the man who held the battery in his hand and who was delegated to kill me, lost his courage at the last moment. If he had waited until I was on those steps before he touched the button that caused the explosion, he would have got me; as it is, he did not." The detective turned away then and followed the wire, which had been bent and twisted in all conceivable shapes, but which extended sufficiently far into the street even yet to indicate that the would-be murderer had stationed himself somewhere on the opposite side of the street while he awaited the arrival of the detective.

But the general upheaval, the shock that came with it and the tramping of thousands of pairs of feet had, of course, moved the wire sufficiently far from its original position, so that from it it was impossible to tell just where the man had waited to commit the act, even if the knowledge of the fact could have been of any appreciable benefit to the detective.

In the meantime other policemen had arrived on the scene and the crowd had been thrust back to a considerable distance.

Somebody had put in a fire-alarm from the adjacent corner, and now three engines and two hook and ladder trucks came hurrying to the scene.

"I think, Collins," said Nick to the policeman, "that if you will just see to it that the firemen are informed that there is no need of their presence here, I'll say a few words to this crowd. I think that'll be the quickest way of getting rid of them."

He stepped, then, upon the wrecked tonneau of the automobile, and, raising his hand for silence, he said:

"My friends, I will do what I can to allay your curiosity about this occurrence. I suppose many of you know who I am, and what I am, and this incident of the explosion is merely the effort upon the part of one or more of the enemies I have made, because I am a detective, to put me out of commission. I am very happy to inform you that no casualities have occurred, and that no person has been even slightly injured. The only damage that has been done is to my house, and that can be very easily repaired. I thank you all for your interest in the matter in coming here, and I want to say to you that if I could tell you who did it, I would, and that not being able, you will do me a great personal favor if you will kindly disperse and leave me and my assistants to find an explanation as best we can."

The result of this short speech by the detective demonstrated how thoroughly he understood the handling of men.

Somebody in the crowd raised his voice and shouted:

"Three cheers for Nick Carter!"

These were given with a will, and then the same voice shouted again:

"And now, my friends, let us do all that we can to help him by getting out of the way as quickly as possible."

Five minutes later the scene of the explosion in front of Nick Carter's residence was entirely deserted, save for a few idlers, who never can be driven away from such a place, and the policemen and Nick's immediate friends, who had gathered around him.

And then the detective turned to his assistants, who were close at hand, and said coolly:

"Well, lads, it seems to me that we have a case now of our own, and I think we had better begin on it at once."

CHAPTER II.

THE DETECTIVE RECEIVES A CALL.

The captain of the precinct, who had arrived just as the crowd was dispersing, detailed two of his command to stand guard in front of the detective's house, and then entered it with Nick, where they proceeded at once to his study, for, saving the wreckage at the front of the building and the general shaking up caused by the explosion, the interior was uninjured. Here and there was a crack in the wall or ceiling, but the house had been so substantially constructed that these were unimportant.

"Well, Nick," said the captain, "is there anything I can do in regard to this affair?"

"Not a thing in the world, captain," replied the detective, "thank you just the same. I think it is up to me to attend to it myself. A great many people come to me with cases for me to work out, and now for the second or third time I am going to be my own client."

The captain laughed.

"You seem to take it very coolly," he said.

"How other should I take it?" replied the detective; "it wouldn't do to get excited about it, although I will confess that it does make me angry to think about this useless and unnecessary destruction of property."

"I suppose you have forgotten already that your life was in danger."

"Oh, no. But that is in danger all the time."

"Have you any idea who did this?"

"I think I have a very correct idea as to what is back of it, but as to who did it, speaking personally, I have none at all, unless, of course, one or more of the four Russians I arrested three days ago have escaped or been liberated from jail during my absence from town."

"Who were they?" asked the captain.

"Ivan Dovanief, Prince Michael Orloff, and Madam Dovanief and her daughter, Olga."

"I think," said the captain, "that I know something about that. I was in court this morning, just happened to be there, you know, when Olga Dovanief was brought

up on some kind of a warrant, and it's my impression that she was admitted to bail. I am not certain of it, however, but you could find out easily enough by telephoning to the district attorney's office. There would be some one there at this hour, wouldn't there?"

"Oh, yes," said the detective, and took up the receiver from the desk-telephone at his elbow.

After a moment's conversation over the wire, he returned the receiver to the hook and remarked: "You were correct, captain, in one particular. Olga Dovanief is at liberty."

"Then, I suppose," said the police captain, "that you are more than half-convinced this outrage was committed by her."

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"Hardly that," he said. "I will admit to you, captain, that Olga Dovanief interested me, and that I think her quite capable of even a much greater outrage than this one, provided always that she can find a way to excuse it on the plea of political interest or the advancement of the cause she believes she loves."

"Huh?" said the captain. "What cause is that?"

"The freedom of Russia," smiled the detective.

"All tommy rot, Nick."

"Oh, yes, tommy rot, if you please, from our standpoint, but from theirs—and particularly from the standpoint of a woman like Olga Dovanief, a holy cause. She would not hesitate to murder me in any one of the thousand ways in which such an act might be committed, if it were for the advancement of her cause, but as a mere act of vengeance against me because I arrested her and her father and mother as well, I think she is incapable of it."

The captain grinned.

"She is beautiful, isn't she, Nick?"

"Quite so, captain."

"And young?"

"About twenty or twenty-one; perhaps a year or two older than that."

"Interesting?"

"Decidedly so."

"Then, Nick, I don't think it is at all surprising that you are inclined to hold her guiltless of this outrage; but, being a police captain and in charge of this precinct where the outrage has occurred, and taking into consideration all the circumstances connected with it with which I am familiar, I regard it as my duty, notwithstanding what you have said, to seek and find Olga Dovanief, if possible, to arrest her when found, and to charge her when arrested with attempted murder with a high explosive."

The detective leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily, and then he pushed a box of cigars across the table toward the officer and said:

"I haven't the slightest objection, captain, only when you do find her and arrest her and make that very specific charge against her, I hope you will lose no time in letting me know about it."

"Certainly not," replied the captain.

"How long have you been connected with the force?" asked Nick.

"Almost twenty-one years."

"And I suppose you've got about ten more that you can serve before you reach the age limit, haven't you?"

"Just about, Nick; why?"

"Because, captain, if you seek and find and arrest Olga Dovanief before the time of your retirement, if you will let me know about it, I will buy you a new suit of clothes."

The captain started from the chair to his feet for a moment indignant at the implied reflection upon his abilities, but Nick smiled at him so genially across the table that he sat down again, although biting his nether lip in vexation.

"Don't get huffy, captain," said the detective, "you may be able to find Olga Dovanief within the next two hours, for all I know, for if she was released on bail, I don't think she will make any present effort to hide herself away. To be plain with you, I regard her now as being entirely innocent of this affair, although I haven't a doubt that she could tell who did it without a moment's hesitation."

"Well, doesn't that make her an accessory?" asked the captain.

"Hardly that, captain."

"I am to consider it useless to arrest her, even if I should find her?"

"Entirely so."

"Well, it's pretty certain in my mind that some one who's a sympathizer with that outfit is guilty of this."

"There's no doubt of that, captain."

"If that is so, don't you think that her arrest would lead to the discovery of the others? Don't you think we can compel her to tell us who these others are, and where they are?"

"Not on your life! Torture wouldn't draw information from a woman of her character. She is wedded to her cause, captain. I don't believe she would commit a crime to satisfy personal vengeance or animosity any more than I doubt that she would murder a hundred or a thousand people without a quiver of an eyelash if she believed that by doing so she could benefit the cause she adores."

"You're a queer chap, Nick," replied the captain, rising. "I'll leave the thing as it is, only you know if there is anything at all in which I can be of service, you have only to let me know about it."

"Sure thing, captain, and I'm much obliged to you."

The detective descended with the police official to the basement floor and saw him safely out of the house,

where already Joseph and Patsy and Ten-Ichi were working to get some order out of the chaos, assisted by men who had hastily been summoned to aid in the labor.

After giving a few simple directions, he returned to the study with Chick, where they shut themselves in, and the detective said:

"Now, Chick, what has happened since I have been away?"

"Nothing at all, Nick; that is, if you refer to anything that may have happened that could be associated with this business."

"There have been no threatening letters?"

"No."

"I saw you cross the street before we came in the house after the explosion, and make some inquiries along the other side. What did you find out?"

"Merely that a tall, poorly dressed man, who looked like a foreigner, has been seen loitering around here nearly all the afternoon; it was probably that man who set off the explosion."

"Did you get a description of him?"

"An imperfect one, but enough to satisfy me that he was a Russian. The description answers to a general one of a Russian of the middle class."

"Chick, who, beside yourself and the members of this household, knew that I was out of town or had any idea when I would return?"

"So far as I am aware, nobody."

"I think," said Nick, "that you are the only one whom I did tell when I would return, but it seems to me as if this Russian must have had a pretty good idea of it."

"Not knowing that you were away, it might be that they arranged the explosion to take place underneath the steps on the general idea that you would return just before the dinner-hour."

"That is probably the explanation of it," replied the detective.

"Do you really think," asked Chick, "that Olga Dovanief had nothing to do with this?"

"Certainly I think so. I told the captain just exactly my opinion."

"Don't you think, Nick, that even she might be persuaded that you are so inimical to the cause she loves that your death might be of direct benefit to her?"

"It is quite possible."

"Well, in that case, she wouldn't hesitate to perform such an act as this one."

"Chick," said the detective, leaning back in his chair and lighting a fresh cigar, for owing to the confusion of the afternoon the dinner-hour was indefinitely postponed, "it would not surprise me a particle if Olga Dovanief, being at liberty and having already heard through some of her own countrymen of this attempt upon my life, would call here in person to clear herself of any suspicion that I might entertain against her."

"Do you think she would care so much as that about your opinion?" asked Chick.

"Perhaph not about my personal opinion, because I am who I am, but if I read Olga Dovanief correctly, she is a young woman who would dare any extremity whatever so long as she considers herself right, but at the same time will be eager to clear her skirts of complicity in any such dastardly outrage as this one."

Chick smiled, and was silent for a moment; then he said quietly:

"I thought the captain, while he was here, rather insinuated that the beauty and attractiveness of Olga had made an impression upon you, Nick, and I am rather inclined to think he was right about it. Did the beauty and attractiveness of Olga Dovanief so affect you, Nick, that you cannot believe her guilty of a deliberate crime?"

Nick laughed.

"Hardly that, Chick," he said; "but Olga Dovanief reminds me very much of another Olga whom we both knew very well long ago, old chap. She is very much the same character and make-up as that one, and you know what she was."

Chick left his chair and crossed the room, shrugging his shoulders twice while he did so. Then he turned and said:

"Personally, Nick, I feel very much as the captain did about this affair; in other words, I think it is my duty and yours, for that matter, to seek and find and arrest Olga Dovanief with the least possible delay."

Nick did not reply, and while the two were silent the sound of advancing footsteps up the stairway could be heard, and a moment later Joseph tapped at the door and entered.

"A lady to see you, sir," he said. "I had to bring her in by the basement way, of course. First, I was about to refuse her admittance at all, telling her that you were engaged, but when she informed me that it was about this very outrage that she came here, I brought her inside."

"Quite right," said the detective, smiling toward Chick. "Did she give you her name, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir. She told me to tell you that Olga had called to see you."

The detective laughed toward Chick now, in a low voice, and he said to Joseph:

"Show her into the library, and tell her I will be down directly," and when Joseph had gone he added to Chick: "You see I was right about her, for, after all, Olga Dovanief has called here to assure me that she had no knowledge of this business."

"On the contrary," said Chick, with a shrug, "I should say that she had called with the determination to pull the wool over your eyes, if she can do so."

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S DEFIANCE.

When Nick Carter entered the library, Olga was standing beside the table idly turning over the leaves of a magazine, but she raised her eyes to his the moment he entered, and smiled at him as she might have done had she called there upon one of the most commonplace events that might have happened.

"I am very glad to know that you are uninjured, Mr. Carter," she said.

"No doubt," replied Nick coldly, for he had determined to assume an attitude of suspicion for the occasion, believing that he might force her to say more than she had intended to do when she came there.

"There was nobody injured, was there?" she inquired, purposely avoiding the insinuation of his previous reply.

"No."

"Your house is rather badly wrecked, Mr. Carter."

"Yes."

"Am I to understand by your attitude that you attribute this outrage to me?"

"I think that you are at least indirectly accountable for it," he answered.

"If you mean by that that you think it was done by people who think as I do, you are correct, but if you mean to insinuate that I had any knowledge of such an intention, you are entirely wrong."

Nick bowed his head coldly, but did not reply in words.

"You do not believe me?" she asked.

"I have not said that I do not."

"Your manner implies it."

"The implications of another, as we sometimes understand them, Miss Dovanief, are apt to be the result of our own fears concerning the matter."

She looked at him steadily for a moment. There was not the slightest tinge of fear in her gaze. It was level and direct and full of earnest purpose. She said:

"As soon as I was told of what had happened here, Mr. Carter, I came to you. I came because I thought you would at once be inclined to suspect me of knowledge of it—previous knowledge of it, I mean."

"That idea had occurred to me," said Nick.

"But now," she continued, "as I look at you, I don't believe that for one moment you have honestly thought me guilty of this thing. You are only trying to make me think that you suspect me of it."

Nick returned her gaze as steadily as her own, and he did not permit the expression of his voice or words to change as a result of this clear statement of hers. He replied:

"The news of it seemed to have reached you quickly, Miss Dovanief."

"It did," she said.

"Admitting, then, for the sake of argument, that you had no previous knowledge of it, is it not true that you now have knowledge concerning who did commit the act?"

"No," she said, "I have no direct knowledge."

"Who told you about the occurrence?"

"A compatriot of mine, who was told of it by still another, who was directly concerned in it."

"Ah," said Nick, "if I am to believe your statements, then you didn't do this thing; you had no knowledge that it was to be done; the person who told you about it did not do it, and had no knowledge that it was to be done, but that person, nevertheless, is in touch with the one who did it. Is that correct?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Carter."

"So you have come here to clear yourself of complicity in the act, it all having been very carefully arranged so that there was nothing you could betray to me in discussing it."

"Yes," she replied, "that is a clear statement of the facts as they exist.

"And you expected me to believe all this?"

"I expected you to give me at least the benefit of the doubt."

"Do you mean to tell me, Olga Dovanief, that you don't know who placed that bomb, or the dynamite or whatever it was, under my front stoop, and that you don't know who exploded it in the effort to kill me?"

"I mean to tell you exactly that."

Nick passed around the table and drew a chair forward.

"Won't you be seated?" he asked.

"Thank you," she said, and dropped upon the chair.

"When you answered me in the way you did just now, that you don't know who did these things, you spoke of literal knowledge, did you not? Of what a lawyer would call prima facie evidence?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then, I suppose, I may be excused for assuming that it would not be a difficult matter for you to guess the names of the persons who were concerned in this plot?"

"I think," she replied, smiling at him coolly, "that this is a case of far too serious importance to explain it by guesswork."

"Quite right, Miss Dovanief. I wonder if you realize to what you have subjected yourself by coming here as you have?"

"Certainly I do, Mr. Carter."

"When you were announced, my first assistant and myself were discussing you. It was his opinion that you should be arrested at once, since you were at liberty, and returned to prison charged with this dynamite outrage."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I have prepared myself to expect such a thing," she said coolly, "but not from you."

"Why not from me?"

"Because I had determined that although our acquaintance is very slight, you had read me too correctly to suspect me of such a thing as this one was."

"Perhaps you are right," he admitted.

"It is your business and profession, Mr. Carter, to read character, and I believe that you read it quite correctly, as a rule. I think you read mine to your own satisfaction, and I believed that you understood me quite well indeed."

"I believed so myself, Miss Dovanief."

She leaned toward him, resting one elbow on the table and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Have you changed your opinion of me so soon?" she asked.

"No," he said, "I will be truthful with you; I have not."

"Did you think, Mr. Carter, when that explosion occurred, that I was guilty of it?"

"No, I did not."

"Have you believed since that explosion occurred that I was one who could be guilty of such a thing?"

"No, not under the circumstances; I have not."

"Don't you know, Mr. Carter, that I couldn't commit such an act as that? Don't you know that every impulse within me would revolt from such a wanton act of destruction? Don't you understand me well enough—didn't you read me well enough to know that I wouldn't hurt a fly, figuratively speaking, for the sake of personal animosity?"

"That is the way I read you."

"Don't misunderstand me," she went on rapidly, leaning still farther forward and speaking with eagerness and enthusiasm. "If you stood between me and the cause of liberty for my people; if you hindered the accomplishment of the idea to which I have devoted my existence, I would destroy you with no more thought about it or regret for it than I would feel for a pebble that I might kick out of my path. In such a case, Mr. Carter, I would sacrifice any life no matter how near and dear to me it might be, that intervened between me and the accomplishment of a purpose which I believe to be holy and sublime. But wanton murder and destruction, useless assassination, and the promiscuous slaying of Russian officials and of men, indiscriminately, is horrible to me—so horrible to me, that many times I have resented it almost to the point of abandoning my cause, and you must know there is only one way in which I could abandon it."

"How would that be?" asked Nick.

"Self-destruction, Mr. Carter. My life for the cause I uphold could only die with me. So long as I live I will believe in it and fight for it."

Nick was silent for a moment, regarding her steadfastly, while she returned his gaze with level eyes and unmoved countenance, save for the flush of enthusiasm which still lingered upon her face.

She was an exquisitely beautiful woman, who, strangely enough, seemed totally unmindful of her beauty, while not unconscious of it, and looking upon her now, Nick believed that she would not hesitate to make use even of her beauty and her fascination for the furtherance of the cause she loved.

In the long ago he had known another such, and now he found himself again comparing this Olga with that one who had played such an important part in his life.*

"I believe you, Olga," he said unconsciously, addressing her by her given name, so immersed had he been in the comparison already alluded to. "You believe your cause to be a holy one, and doubtless it is one as viewed by you and your sympathizers, but is also a hopeless one, Olga, which can never succeed, not in a thousand years, to use a colloquial expression, upon the plans and by the methods adopted by the followers of your cause."

She raised her right hand to interrupt him, and she said slowly and calmly:

"Mr. Carter, there is no argument that I have not heard or thought of in support of the theory you are advancing, and I should tell you before you say more that there is none that can be advanced which would change me in the slightest degree. I call myself a Russian patriot, and I believe I am one. I shall work out my destiny to the best of my understanding, and for the most good that I can accomplish. There is nothing on the earth or above it or beneath it that could influence me. I shall go on my way irrespective of who or what obstructs my path, and indifferent to the consequences which may come to those who do; and now may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"First, do you believe my statement that I had nothing to do with this outrage here?"

"Yes," he replied, "I do."

"Do you believe that I had no previous knowledge of it, and would not have consented to it had I known?"

"Yes."

"I would like you to believe that under such circumstances I would even have gone to the extent of warning you of it, if I could not have prevented the act."

"I believe that also."

"When you arrested me, Mr. Carter, with my father and the others, you made the statement that you did not believe that I was at all guilty of complicity in that murder."

"I said only what I believed to be true."

"I was charged merely with being an accessory after the fact, was I not?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what that means under your law?"

*See "Tracked Across the Atlantic" in the *Magnet Library.*

"It means that you had guilty knowledge of the crime immediately after it was committed, and that you aided and abetted the real criminals in their efforts to escape justice."

"That is perhaps true," she said musingly, "but, even so, I have come to you to-day with a double purpose, one I have already stated, and the other was to ask you if there is any legal method by which I may hope to escape the consequences of that affair so that I may return to Russia within the next thirty days."

"I am afraid not," he said.

She left her chair and crossed the room quickly to the door. There she turned and asked:

"You don't mean to arrest me now, do you?"

"No, I do not," he replied; "you are legally at liberty, and, unless I charge you with this dynamite outrage, there is no ground upon which I might cause your arrest at the present moment."

"Thank you," she said; "I will bid you good night." She opened the door and passed through it so quickly that she was outside almost before the detective realized it. Then he started after her.

"Olga!" he exclaimed, as he reached the door, and she stopped and turned toward him. "What do you mean to do?" he asked her.

She looked at him with smiling eyes, which yet had something of defiance in them, and replied distinctly:

"I mean to leave for Russia as soon as it is possible to do so, and at whatever cost!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE NIHILISTS' SECOND MOVE.

The detective might have called Olga back to him then, and there were many reasons why he should have done so, he thought.

He believed that he should have warned her of the consequences of what she proposed doing in forfeiting the bail bond that had been given for her and leaving the jurisdiction of the court.

The moment she did such a thing she would be subject to a bench-warrant, could be arrested anywhere she might be found, would at once be cast into prison again, and would not be admitted to bail a second time.

But he realized that no argument he could put forward would have any effect upon her, and so he shrugged his shoulders and turned back into the library, permitting her to depart through the basement alone, and hoping, if the truth be told, that she might make good her escape as she desired to do.

Her sudden departure had made it impossible for him to ask her many questions concerning the identity of the people who had committed the outrage against him that he would have liked to have done; but he reasoned to himself at once that she would have said nothing to betray them, even under the circumstances she abhorred.

He lingered in the library a few moments, strolling up and down the room in deep thought concerning Olga and her environment, and he touched tentatively with his fingers the leaves of the magazine she had turned and the chair she had occupied, conscious of a latent force that she had left behind her when she took her departure so suddenly.

Olga Dovanief affected the detective strangely. He saw in her a fanatic who was so devoted to the cause she espoused that she would hesitate at nothing to further its aims and ends.

She was one, like that other Olga who has been mentioned, who would consider personal freedom, her life, and even her honor and reputation as nothing when compared with the success of her ambitious hopes, and he mentally decided in that moment that if she did choose to make good her escape from the country he would personally make no search to bring her back to it to suffer for a crime in which she had really taken no part.

For being an accessory after the fact in the commission of a crime such as that one was is merely, and in this case was, the result of the affection for those implicated rather than sympathy with the crime itself, and hence there was no real guilt.

When, a little later, he returned to Chick, who was still waiting in the study for him, he recounted in detail the conversation which had occurred between Olga and himself, to all of which Chick listened with the abstract air of one who is concerned with other things; but when the detective told of Olga's defiant answer in which she had stated that she should return to Russia within the next thirty days, no matter what the consequences might be, Chick exclaimed rather meaningly:

"It is to be hoped, Nick, that she will take her sympathizers into her confidence about this intended flight of hers."

"Why so?" asked the detective.

"Because, if she disappears without imparting the knowledge of her intentions to any one, they are likely to misconstrue her absence."

"I am afraid," said Nick, "that I don't quite understand you."

"You would be the first to make the same suggestion that I am making, Nick, if our positions in this matter were reversed."

"Nevertheless, I am still in the dark, Chick."

"These people who are here with her are all Russians, are they not?"

"I suppose they are."

"And nihilists at that?"

"Yes," said Nick, "we are apt to group all Russian political agitators under that one word."

"Then, as such, they are accustomed to sudden disappearances like this one of Olga's will be if she doesn't take them into her confidence. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know what explanation they will be likely to give it under those circumstances, Nick?"

"I'll confess that I hadn't thought of it until you mentioned it," replied the detective, "but I understand now what you are getting at."

"They will know that she came here to see you, won't they?"

"It's more than likely they know it now."

"And if she doesn't return to them after her call here; if she is not seen by any of them after her visit to you; if she disappears from their knowledge from the moment she entered your house, won't they charge you with responsibility for her disappearance?"

"I expect they will."

"You hadn't thought of that, had you?"

"Not till you suggested it."

"Nick, they will put you in exactly the same category where they place the chief officers of their own secret police and the head of what they call the Third Section. If Olga does not impart to them her intention of leaving the country, if she chooses to escape from them as well as from the law here, and quietly fades out of sight from the moment she leaves this house, her friends and followers will jump to the conclusion that you have arrested her and placed her in solitary confinement, and all the arguments in the world, notwithstanding, they will continue to believe it as long as she pleases to keep herself in the dark."

"It seems to me, Chick," said the detective, "that you are presuming a good deal."

"Don't you admit the truth of what I say?"

"Yes."

"Then wherein do I presume?"

"You are taking it for granted that when Olga left this house she intended to go away at once and had already planned to do so without communicating her intentions to any of the members of her own party who happens to be here now."

"Well," said Chick, "that happens to be exactly the way I sized her up, more particularly since what you have said about the manner of her departure."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and crossed the room twice, then he said:

"I wouldn't wonder if you were right, Chick. I had thought when I came up-stairs that we would abandon this whole business, and, on the theory that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, would conclude that the nihilists would leave us alone now that their first attempt has failed."

"But you think differently now, don't you?"

"I think this, Chick, that if Olga does depart without acquainting her friends of what she intends to do, they will, as you say, believe that she has been arrested and placed in solitary confinement as political offenders are treated in the cities of Russia; and, of course, in such an event, they will hold me guilty of the act, and I think, also, that in that case we will be likely to have our hands pretty full of Russian affairs until Olga chooses to communicate with some of her friends who are here in this country."

"And therefore?" asked Chick, pausing for the detective to finish his sentence.

"And, therefore," continued the detective, "unless we want another experience with dynamite and infernal machines very shortly, I think it behooves us to lose no time in rounding up the people who paid us that little compliment this afternoon."

The belated dinner was announced at that moment, and the two detectives descended to partake of it, so there was no further discussion of these matters until that was disposed of, save the few references that were made to it on the part of Patsy and Ten-Ichi during the meal.

The front of the house was patched up as well as possible for the night, with timbers that were brought there for that purpose, and a policeman sent by the captain of the precinct stood guard outside on the pavement, although Nick regarded this act as a waste of time and energy.

He telephoned to the captain that he did not need the man at all, and that it was unnecessary to keep him there, but the captain responded that he preferred that it should be so, and that, anyhow, it would do the man good, if nothing else.

The detective's sleeping-room being the second floor front of the house, had been greatly disturbed by the concussion of the explosion, and he directed Joseph to fix him up a cot in the study, where he decided to pass the night, and this study, as the reader doubtless knows, was located in an extension at the rear of the house on the same floor. Chick's sleeping-room was the rear one of the second floor, not counting the extension, and had two windows which opened upon the yard, for the house is located upon a double city lot.

These remarks are made descriptive of the sleeping-accommodations of the house to account for the occurrences of the night that followed, which for the time being or until Nick thought them out correctly, were profound mysteries.

It was about half-past ten o'clock that night when Nick and his first assistant bade each other good night, the latter to pass through the hallway to his own room and Nick, as has been stated, to remain in the study and sleep upon the couch which Joseph had prepared for him.

When the detective was left alone he picked up a book in which he had become interested, and consumed two

cigars while he finished it, so that when he was ready to retire, a glance at the clock told him that it was just a little past midnight when he put out his light.

Chick, when he left his chief, passed through into his own room, and also picked up a book to read a while before retiring; but for some reason it did not interest him, and, presently casting it aside, he passed through the connecting doors into Nick's room, now unoccupied, and with every pane of glass in the windows shattered outward; he turned on the electric light and looked about him to inspect more carefully the consequences of the explosion as they affected that particular room.

Presently he stepped to one of the windows and looked out, and he could see the policeman on duty outside, walking up and down in front of the house, performing his guard-duty.

He stood there for several moments, presently calling down to the policeman, exchanging a word or two with him, and bidding him good night; and then he turned off the lights, and returned again to his own room, where, a few moments later, he retired.

In the morning the detective, who always awakened early, was up and stirring soon after dawn.

He passed into the bathroom for his morning plunge, when he was startled by hearing a commotion from the street in front of the house, and he quickly passed through into his own regular sleeping-room to look from the windows in order to discover what was the matter.

What he saw was sufficiently startling.

On the pavement directly beneath the window from which he was looking, the policeman was stretched flat upon his back, as if he were dead, and the detective even from that distance could see blood upon his face. Another policeman who had discovered him was bending over the prostrate body.

Nick turned about quickly and passed into Chick's room to call him, intending to send him down at once, but as he crossed the threshold, he stopped abruptly.

Chick's bed was in the utmost disorder, but the first assistant was not there, and Nick Carter realized instantly that his nihilistic enemies had made a second move against him already.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CHICK.

At the moment when the detective discovered the absence of Chick from his room, it did not at once occur to him that the first assistant had been forcibly abducted from the house.

His first thought was that Chick had heard the alarm from the outside and had already hastened down the stairs to discover what was the matter, but when he returned to the window and looked out again not only to discover that Chick was not there and that no one inside the house save himself seemed to have been aroused by the commotion, it instantly came to him that the people who had struck down the policeman who had been left there on guard, had also entered the house.

Even then the idea of an abduction was not uppermost in his mind when he began to look about him for signs which the intruders might have left behind them, but when he discovered that not an article of Chick's clothing which he had worn the preceding day was missing from the room, and that many of the bedclothes were gone, he decided, of course, that these latter had been used to roll the captive in, and that Chick had been carried away by force.

Even this was at first inexplicable to him until suddenly it occurred to him that the entrance had been made with himself as the object of it, and that the fact that he had been absent from his room and was occupying the study for that night, had interfered in the plans of the nocturnal visitors.

That Chick had been carried off instead of himself was merely an accident.

There was no doubt in the detective's mind that they had ascertained previously which room he occupied at night himself, and having visited it and found it unoccupied, they had supposed that Chick, who was sleeping in the adjoining room, was the man they sought.

All the while he was thinking, he was rapidly throwing on some outer clothing, and now he hastened downstairs and through the basement and so out upon the pavement in front of the house, just as a second and a third policeman arrived to view the body of their fallen comrade. But he was not dead, although he appeared so at first glance.

He had been struck upon the head by a heavy object, which might have been a bludgeon or the butt of a pistol, and the force of the blow had made a deep cut in the edge of the hair above his forehead, so that he had bled quite profusely, and it had flowed down over his features, giving the appearance of a much more serious wound than was the case.

It was serious enough, however, to have accomplished the purpose of the men who attacked the officer, for not only was the policeman still unconscious, but he remained in a state bordering upon coma for many hours afterward, and it was late that afternoon before he could describe what had taken place prior to the time when he had been stricken down.

One of the policemen hastily summoned an ambulance from the nearest hospital, and their comrade was quickly carried away to it, for aside from the fact that there were no adequate accommodations in Nick's house for the moment, it was necessary that he should have at once the medical care and attention that could be given to him only in a hospital.

Nick remained there until the ambulance had carried

the man away, and then he returned to his own room, and from that gazed into the one lately occupied by Chick, and from which he had been so mysteriously spirited away. As yet, the detective did not arouse the other members of his household, for incidents were passing so swiftly relative to these Russian nihilists who had pitted themselves against him that he was glad of the opportunity to be alone until he could think over carefully all that had occurred.

It must be remembered that the explosion of the preceding day had so wrecked the house of the detective that the way was open for anybody to enter it from the street who cared to do so, and that, therefore, there was no impediment to the attack of the nihilists when the policeman who had been placed on guard was once disposed of.

Nick believed that he could understand perfectly how the attack had been made, for a policeman on guard, as this one who had been stricken down, might be easily approached by one or by even two men on the street while he was there, since the policeman would not expect such a thing as an open attack upon him. He would have no reason to do so.

He would regard his presence there as merely a protection to the house itself and not of the occupants particularly; his mere presence he would regard as sufficient to keep any chance night prowler from attempting to enter the building.

There was no doubt that the men who had committed the outrage of the preceding afternoon understood perfectly well that no results had come from it save the demolition of the front stoop and a part of the front wall of the house; there was no doubt that they knew perfectly well that no fatalities had resulted, and also that it would now be a very easy matter to gain admittance to the house once the policeman who guarded it was out of the way.

With the warning that Chick had uttered the preceding afternoon fresh in his mind, the detective could not but determine that Olga had done as they thought she might, that is, she had chosen to disappear from her friends as well as to escape from the consequences of her association with the murder on the East Side of the city.

"Doubtless," Nick said to himself, while he stood peering into Chick's room, "these men knew perfectly well when Olga came here to call upon me in order to deny personal participation in the dynamite outrage, and it is also likely that she had promised to see one or more of them again, and to talk with them further after making her call upon me. It is possible that they would want her to tell them what I might have to say concerning it.

"And so if she did not reappear to them, if she did not keep her word to see them again and report to them what I had said, it was a very natural deduction in their own minds for them to determine that I had placed her under arrest, and had taken her to that kind of solitary confinement which is so apt to be the rule in their own country, and which they naturally believe to be practised in all parts of the world.

"Possibly they may have thought that I had detained her in my own house, and, therefore, that may have been their original incentive for their visit here during the night, but if that is so, and if they searched the house, for they would be likely to do that if they were looking for her, I cannot understand why I, or some of the others, was not aroused.

"Their belief that Olga was a prisoner in this house from the beginning, would explain also the abduction of Chick, for not finding her here, and believing him to be me, they would reason that if they got him into their power and could carry him away into captivity to do with him as they pleased, still believing him to be Nick Carter, they could force him by torture or otherwise, not only to tell them where she was imprisoned, but perhaps to aid them definitely in their efforts to free her.

"I think this is an explanation of the present situation of affairs."

He stepped farther into the room now, and began a systematic search of it; but the intruders, whoever they may have been, had left nothing behind them to indicate who they were or which way they might have gone when they took their departure.

It was nearly five o'clock in the morning when the detective discovered the unconscious policeman outside his house, and it had been twelve o'clock at night when he turned out his light to go to sleep; it was likely, therefore, that the assault and entrance to the house had occurred between half-past twelve and three in the morning.

If they had been there before half-past twelve, Nick most likely would have heard them; for he believed that it was not long after he extinguished his light when he had gone to sleep, but he had slept very lightly, as he knew.

There was absolutely no means of telling what way the men had gone with their captive, after their departure from the house, and Nick had no knowledge of any particular community of Russians with whom these people, who belonged to the coterie of the Dovaniefs, might have affiliated.

He knew, moreover, that when people of that character seek an asylum in a country other than their own, they do not group themselves together clannishly, but choose to spread out over a considerable territory, so that in the case of the arrest of one of them the others might have ample opportunity to effect their escape.

Plainly, in the present predicament, there was only one method of procedure for Nick Carter, and that was to seek out Dovanief and Prince Michael in their prison

cells and to endeavor to make them talk; or, failing to do that, to make the same effort with Madam Dovanief.

But here Nick smiled when this thought came to him, for in his wide experiences he had invariably found that it is much more difficult to get information of this sort from a woman than from a man.

When the household was astir and Patsy and Ten-Ichi and the others had been made aware of the occurrences of the night, Nick assigned each of his assistants to their respective duties for the day, and immediately after breakfast visited the Tombs, where he had Ivan Dovanief brought to him at once in the consultation-room.

"Dovanief," he said to him as soon as they were alone together, "I suppose you are aware of the fact that your daughter has been set at liberty?"

Dovanief stared at the detective coldly and nodded his head in the affirmative; and then, after a moment, he replied:

"I was aware of it, yes; but I am also aware of another fact."

"Indeed?" said the detective. "What is that?"

"I have been informed, it doesn't matter how or when or by whom, but I have been informed that she has been arrested again and sent to solitary confinement in one of your bigger prisons."

Nick laughed in the Russian's face at the absurdity of the question.

"Don't you know better than that?" he said. "Don't you know that we don't indulge in such practises in this country?"

Again Dovanief stared at the detective, and then he said:

"I do not know what you do, and I do not care, but this I do know, Nick Carter, that before you are twenty-four hours older than you are now, unless in the meantime you cause my daughter to be set free again, you will be a dead man; and that, Mr. Carter, is all that I will have to say to you; I shall not utter another word while you remain here!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIHILIST'S THREAT.

Instead of taking the man at his word, the detective drew up a chair and pointed to it.

"Be seated, Dovanief," he said.

The Russian agitator bowed coldly and seated himself upon the chair, but he made no reply.

"Dovanief," said Nick, standing in front of him, "your daughter has not been rearrested."

The Russian raised his eyes to the detective and said with them as plainly as if he had spoken the words that he did not believe him, and Nick continued:

"Some friends of hers and yours tried to blow me up yesterday with one of your bombs or with something that was highly explosive, and in the evening your daughter called upon me for the purpose of assuring me that she had had nothing to do with that event."

The cold, steady eyes of the nihilist were fixed intently upon the detective's face, and it was plain now that he wished to speak and would have done so but for his late assurance that he would remain silent.

Nick continued:

"She succeeded in so assuring me, Dovanief. She convinced me that she had nothing to do with that outrage, and she convinced me of more than that, which is not necessary that I should tell you; but I do want you to know that during the night my house was visited and my first assistant was carried away by some friends of yours by force. I have no idea where he is now; I have no idea in what danger he stands or what agonies of torture your gentle friends may choose to inflict upon him. I have no doubt they carried him away, believing that he might tell them something about where your daughter has gone, but he knows no more than I do about it, for the reason that she remained less than half an hour in my house and departed as she came, alone."

"You lie," said Dovanief calmly, thus breaking the silence he had put upon himself.

"Do you think that I detained her there?" said Nick.

"Yes."

"Why do you think that?"

"How else could you know that she had disappeared?"

It was a point well taken and the detective could not deny that even to himself, for he had forgotten that in reasoning with Dovanief the arguments that he had exchanged with Chick before retiring the preceding night.

He had himself come to regard it as a fact that Olga had disappeared while really knowing nothing about it, and for the moment it had seemed to him that Dovanief must take his own view of it.

"I only suspected it," he replied to the question, "because of the occurrences that followed. It was the only way in which I could explain the night visit to my house and the attack upon the policeman who stood guard outside of it."

"Well, why did you call me down here to see you?" asked Dovanief, now entirely forgetful of his resolution not to talk.

For a moment the detective did not reply; then he said slowly, returning threat for threat:

"I want to say to you, Dovanief, that many of your people are known to be in this city at the present time, and by 'your people' I mean, of course, those who are directly interested in your cause and its purposes. I mean those who are in sympathy with you and what you are doing or attempting to do here, and those who were concerned more or less directly in the outrage at my house yesterday afternoon."

"Well?" said Dovanief.

"I want to say this to you: I had determined to drop the matter just where it was and to have nothing further to do about it. I had determined, for the sake of your daughter, who has interested me, to permit even this dynamite outrage at my house to pass without further question on my part, and I should have continued so but for this visit to my house in the middle of the night. Now, I want to tell you this, Dovanief: Your Russian country, with its internal troubles, does not interest me in the slightest degree, and I don't care a snap of my finger what you or your people do for or against it here or anywhere else so long as you do not transgress the laws here, but unless my assistant returns to my house before four o'clock this afternoon, I shall put out a drag-net before the day is over which will gather in every Russian nihilist in the city of New York; and those among them whom I cannot make suffer for the transgression of American laws, I will see delivered over to the tender mercies of the Russian authorities, to be dealt with according to their deserts.

"That is all I have got to say to you, Dovanief; I give you back threat for threat. I am perfectly willing to take my chances as to being killed by one of your followers. You are not the first who has threatened me by a good deal, and I'm very much alive yet, and will be when you are dead, but anybody will tell you that Nick Carter never makes an idle threat, and if you have any hopes for the success of your own plans you will pay attention to what I have said to you."

He reached out and struck the bell sharply, calling one of the prison attendants to him, to whom he said curtly:

"Return this man to his cell, if you please, and bring Michael Orloff to me; and I want to say to you before you go, that if either of them wishes to send a message outside the prison to-day permit them to do so."

It was only a few minutes later when Orloff was admitted to the consultation-room.

"Orloff," said Nick, as soon as they were alone, and approaching him by a different method than he had used with Dovanief, "you have very effectual means of communicating with your friends outside the prison, I am told."

"We find them adequate," was the cool response.

"Very good," said Nick; "I want you to send a message to your friends for me."

"Yes? What is it?"

"I want you to tell them that Nick Carter has made the assertion that unless his assistant, called Chick, whom they captured and carried away from my house last night, is immediately set at liberty, I shall use every effort in my power to track them down, one by one, and to have them delivered to the Russian authorities as soon as they are captured."

"It seems to me," said Prince Michael coolly, "that there is a question of international law that comes in there, Mr. Carter, and also of extradition. Political offenses are not extraditible."

"There will be no question of extradition in this case, Prince Michael."

"Indeed? Why not?"

"Because I will carry out to the end what I said I would do even if I am put to the expense of chartering a private yacht to carry those men back to Russia and deliver them there. I am not talking idly, Prince Michael."

For a moment there was an uneasy look in the eyes of the Russian prince, and he shifted from one foot to the other and bit his lip in a perplexed manner, showing that the threat of the detective was not without its effect upon him.

"You could hardly do that," he said.

"And why not?" asked the detective.

"The laws of your country would not permit it."

"Understand me," said Nick, "I never break the laws of my own country, but sometimes I have found it advantageous to defy them, and this would be an occasion of that kind."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders in his characteristic way and then he inquired suddenly:

"Why do you make this threat to me?"

"Because I wish you to send this message to your

friends outside. I have already given instructions that any messages you want to send out will be taken care of."

"And if your assistant is set at liberty, what then?"

"Nothing, then," replied the detective.

"What do you mean by 'nothing, then'?"

"I mean that I will not molest any of them or take any part against them."

"Not even for the outrage that was committed at your house yesterday?"

"No. I had already determined to do nothing about that, when this other affair occurred last night and forced me to change my mind."

"What about Olga Dovanief?" demanded the prince.

"Very well; what about her?" asked the detective.

"Where is she?"

"I do not know."

"Isn't she a prisoner?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Didn't she visit your house last evening, in the early part of the evening?"

"She did."

"Didn't you place her under arrest when she did so?"

"I did not."

"She has not been seen since she entered your house. She was not seen to leave it."

"She was not with me above half an hour."

"My information," said Prince Michael slowly, "is to the effect that when she went to your house last night to inform you that she had nothing to do with the explosion of the bomb under your front stoop, that you immediately placed her under arrest, charged her with that crime and sent her to one of your fortresses, where she is now detained in solitary confinement so thoroughly that she is not likely to be heard from again."

Nick laughed aloud in the man's face.

"Prince Michael," he said, "you are not a fool; that sort of talk sounds very well from Dovanief, but from you, who know better, it has no meaning whatever. You know that we have no fortresses in this country where persons are confined, and you know there is no such thing as solitary confinement as you understand it under your law. Olga Dovanief is at liberty now as much as she ever was, so far as I am concerned."

Orloff shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Carter," he said slowly, "it may be that you are telling me the truth, though I do not believe you; but I will say this to you for your own good: That unless Olga reappears of her own accord, or through your efforts, within another twenty-four hours, your life will not be worth a moment's purchase thereafter!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER ON CENTER STREET.

There was a sense of defeat in Nick Carter's mind when he left the Tombs and strolled slowly down Center Street to the Subway station at the Bridge.

He realized that the settled beliefs of these Russians amounted to an obstinate condition of mind which was practically as immovable by argument as superstition.

They could not be disabused of the idea that the customs of their own country obtained in others, and it was evident to Nick that even Michael Orloff was convinced in his own mind that Olga Dovanief had been spirited away to solitary confinement, where she was to be held indefinitely, or, perhaps, be quietly put out of the way forever, as is frequently done with political prisoners in Russia.

The detective realized fully that the nihilists had made a mistake in their abduction of Chick, and that they were now aware of it, for there was no doubt, particularly since he had talked with Dovanief and Orloff, that it had been the intention of the terrorists to secure possession of the person of himself, Nick Carter.

He realized, also, how utterly impossible it was, or would be, to make either of the imprisoned nihilists talk sufficiently to afford the detective any clue concerning the place where Chick was detained, and he had heard enough from both of the men to convince him that Madam Dovanief was ignorant of their plots and plans, and therefore it would be useless for him to interview her.

There was absolutely no basis whatever upon which he could build a theory to search for Chick, and he was for the moment like a man with his hands tied, because there was nothing to tell him which way to turn.

Nick Carter had had many experiences with nihilists and Russians generally, and he understood their characters and characteristics quite thoroughly.

He knew that they would not hesitate an instant to put Chick to death the moment the possession of his person became dangerous to them, and therefore he realized how necessary it was that he should lose no time in the search for his first assistant.

But where should he search for him?

He was passing the corner of Chambers Street when

the simple solution of the whole matter occurred to him, and he smiled to think he had not thought of it at once.

"Olga, of course!" he exclaimed aloud, and a tall, elegantly dressed gentleman who was passing him at the instant, walking rapidly, started violently, half-turned and almost came to a pause, and in the half-turn that he made fixed his piercing blue eyes upon the detective's face for the briefest instant; then, with a perceptible shrug which only a foreigner could have indulged himself in so suggestively, he passed on rapidly as before.

The incident was one which might not have attracted the attention of any person less keen to notice trivial things than Nick Carter, but the whole circumstance stood out plainly and boldly before him exactly as if the man who had passed him when Nick uttered that remark had spoken the thought that the sound of the name suggested.

It is the comprehension of the little things of daily life, trivial things such as this one apparently was, which is the most necessary qualification of a detective.

To see and understand a gesture and to construe its meaning into a literal something, is an accomplishment only of minds which have been trained to it by long experience.

You or I would have passed on, doubtless, without seeing the stranger at all, certainly without noticing anything that he did as he passed; or even had his act been noticed it would have been attributed to some thought of his own or to some extraneous circumstance.

But Nick knew that he had uttered the name of Olga almost in the man's ear.

They had been passing each other at the intersection of two important thoroughfares, where humanity constantly surged together while it hurried in opposite directions, and the detective had almost brushed against the shoulder of the stranger when he uttered the exclamation that he did.

Taken literally, it was almost as if he had made the remark to the man; almost as if he had intended the stranger to hear it; so it was, that had the conditions been reversed and the stranger spoken something of interest to the detective, the latter would certainly have supposed that it was intended for him.

The name of Olga is as common among Russians as Mary among our own people, and the Olga in whom this stranger was interested might be, and probably was, any one of the thousands of other Olgas who owe allegiance to the czar.

But it was, nevertheless, evident—certain, in fact—that the name had a significance peculiarly its own to the stranger who was passing Nick Carter at the moment he uttered it, and the detective comprehended this fact instantly.

He noticed the start the stranger gave, the turning of his head, the hesitation in his rapid walk, and then the shrug and the resumption of his onward course, as if he instantly disabused his mind of any association between the mere utterance of a passing stranger and the Olga that he knew himself.

Brief as that instant was, however, Nick Carter comprehended that this man did know an Olga somewhere, and there was just one chance among a thousand that the one he knew and the one in whom Nick Carter was now so interested might be the same.

Nick saw what he did see in the conduct of the stranger without himself indulging in any gesture or evidence that he was interested in it.

It is true that the eyes of the two men met for the briefest possible instant, but the meaning of the glances they exchanged was, on the part of the stranger, merely a quick look to discover if he knew this man who had spoken, and on the part of Nick a glance of surprise only.

The stranger had not gone ten feet farther before Nick turned and regarded him curiously, and he saw that the man had already dismissed from his own mind any idea that he might have entertained for a moment that the remark he had overheard had been made with intention.

The man did not look behind him. His interest in the detective was gone as soon as it had arisen, and doubtless he had already dismissed him from his thoughts in the deeper interest that had been conjured up by the pronouncement of that name.

In uttering the remark aloud Nick had merely voiced the idea that had suddenly occurred to him that it was now only about sixteen hours since he last saw Olga, and that it should be a comparatively easy matter for him to find her again before she could leave the city to sail for Russia, as she had expressed her determination.

And it had occurred to him in that instant that Olga would be the one of all others best able to give him the necessary clue in his search for Chick.

When he uttered the exclamation he meant only that he had determined to concentrate all his efforts at once upon finding Olga with the least possible delay.

But now with the incident that has just been so particularly described, many new suggestions concerning the case came to Nick Carter.

There was just this one chance, as already described, that this stranger who had passed him, and who was unquestionably a foreigner, did know the Olga in whom Nick was interested.

Acting upon the impulse of the moment, Nick at once followed the man who had so suddenly interested him without any real reason for doing so, save that which has already been described, and which did not even possess the attraction of being logical.

The two men were just south of the southeast corner of the two streets described when the incident occurred, and it was just as the stranger reached the corner and stepped from the curbing upon the roadway that Nick turned to follow him.

The man went diagonally across the street to the north side of Chambers and then followed it rapidly along toward Broadway, with Nick Carter only a few rods behind him.

And now the detective performed one of those miracles in his appearance for which he was renowned among his fellows, but for which of late he had had so little use.

He had recognized in the keen glance of the stranger an unusual degree of intelligence, and although the blue eyes had rested upon him but an instant, the detective did not doubt that they would recognize him again with a second glance.

Therefore, while he walked rapidly along behind the stranger, he removed the soft hat from his head and carried it in his hand for a moment, folding it into a compact mass as he did so and presently depositing it in one of his pockets, from which at the same time he produced a cap. This he carried in his hand a little distance before he placed it on his head, in order that any person behind him or near him who might have been observing would not notice the change that was being made. When the cap was on his head, Nick produced from another pocket a small bristling and closely cropped mustache of iron gray, which he breathed upon for a moment and then quickly adjusted to his upper lip.

When he had gone a few steps farther a bit of cosmetic from another pocket was passed swiftly along each eyebrow, darkening them, and a few delicate lines were quickly traced near the corners of his eyes and between his brows—so delicate that they could hardly be seen, and yet sufficiently in evidence to give a decided appearance of added years to the detective.

It may seem to the reader that these changes were insignificant, for the detective had no opportunity to change any part of his clothing save his head-wear.

But one of the theories of the detective in making a quick alteration in his appearance was not to change it too much, and he would not have hesitated now to have passed around directly in front of the stranger who had interested him and to have permitted the latter to study him closely.

The alteration that had been made was just sufficient for the needs of the moment, and although the stranger, had he looked at Nick now, might have been puzzled to know where he had seen the face before, there was still sufficient change in its appearance so that he would not have associated it with the man who had cried in his ear: "Olga, of course!"

The two passed rapidly through Chambers Street to Broadway, where the stranger at once boarded a northbound car and Nick climbed into a seat directly behind him.

The man remained upon the car until they arrived at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where he got down and entered the building, Nick still following him, for now the detective was even more interested than before in this man who had attracted his attention so strangely.

At the hotel the man went directly to the desk, called for a key and hastened to one of the elevators and was shot upward out of sight, while Nick, who had not attempted to follow him any farther, waited around the corridor, for the manner of the man had convinced the detective that he was hastening to his room merely to procure some article he wanted and would presently reappear.

Nick was not mistaken.

Within ten minutes the stranger stepped from the elevator again, crossed to the desk and tossed his key upon it, and then, with rapid strides, hurried out through the Twenty-third Street entrance, where he leaped into a coupé, after giving a hurried direction to the driver which Nick was unable to hear.

As the man slammed the door after him, the driver started his horse away at a rapid trot toward the east, and, without an instant's hesitation now that the chase had begun, Nick sprang into a hansom that was near at hand and called out to the driver as he did so:

"Double fare and a good tip, besides, if you keep that coupé in sight without letting the driver or the man inside of it know that you are doing so!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S TIMELY INTERFERENCE.

It has always been the experience of Nick Carter that the most important and far-reaching results of the practise of his profession have happened by accident, or at least have had the appearance of accident at the time of the occurrences.

He had taken up the chase of this man on the impulse of the moment and without a definite reason for doing so, save merely the unimportant one that the stranger had manifested interest in the name of Olga.

The appearance of the man would have argued against the detective's conduct on this occasion for the reason that he was tall and elegantly dressed, and if his general appearance was any criterion at all, was somewhere a person of considerable consequence, while on the other hand the people with whom Olga had been associated belonged to an entirely different class, notwithstanding the fact that both Dovanief and Orloff were gentlemen by birth, as gentility is counted in other countries.

But this man whom Nick was following was unmistakably a Russian as well as a personage of refinement, and although the detective could not have told in plain terms exactly why he was following the man had he been asked to do so, he was none the less insistent upon finding out who he was and what his business might be, now that he had undertaken the chase.

But Nick was soon to discover that he had made no mistake.

The coupé in which the Russian was a passenger traveled eastward rapidly, through Twenty-third Street to First Avenue, and thence turned south, still going with all the speed that it was possible for the driver to urge out of the horse; and so it continued on, with now and then a turn, until at last it drew up suddenly before the door of the very house where Nick had on a former occasion made the arrest of the Russian plotters.

The moment the coupé came to a stop before the house the man leaped out and, with a word to the driver, dashed up the steps and disappeared inside, while the man on the box leaned back negligently in his place and lighted a cigar, as if he had been told that he would have considerable time to wait.

Nick's driver had proved himself an expert in the art of following; while he had remained sufficiently close to the quarry to keep them clearly in view, he had not approached near enough to attract attention; and the instant the coupé stopped before the house already described, Nick's driver took his conveyance to the curb at the opposite side of the street, half-way down the block behind them.

The detective got out at once and, passing the driver a bill, told him to wait; then he crossed the street and sauntered slowly along it toward the house the Russian had entered.

"It is the most natural thing in the world," he told himself, "that Olga, upon regaining her liberty, should have returned directly to this house, for it is evident that her father and Prince Michael maintain two homes in New York, to either of which they could escape if too hotly pursued; that one where the murder was committed and this one where I found them later and made the arrest."

Satisfied in his own mind now that the man he had encountered so fortunately and yet so strangely on the street had led him directly to Olga, the detective did not hesitate about following him at once into this house; nor did he attempt to do so by stealth.

His present business with Olga was a plain proposition.

He had practically permitted her the opportunity of making her escape from the country when he let her depart from his house as she did the preceding evening, and for that he considered that she owed him something—something which she could repay adequately by information which would lead to the recovery of Chick.

Therefore, when he reached the steps, he hurried up them, intending to ring the bell and thus to summon some one to the door, and he intended to ask for Olga Dovanief.

To his surprise the inner door of the vestibule was slightly ajar, as if it had been slammed shut by the man who had just passed through it and with such force that it had rebounded before the latch caught.

There was no hesitation in Nick's act then.

He crossed the vestibule without pausing, pushed the door open, entered, and closed it softly behind him; then he stood in the hallway listening. Once before, in the company of a member of the mounted squad of policemen, Nick had stood in this same hallway listening, and that was the time when he had followed Olga and her

father so swiftly through the streets of New York to it.* He was perfectly familiar with the interior of the building, and while he paused there he wondered if this man, who had arrived a moment or two ahead of him, had gone to a room on one of the upper floors.

He had stood there less than a moment when some one sneezed in the front parlor, which was sheltered from the hall only by curtains that were draped over an otherwise vacant doorway. The sneeze was masculine, and Nick guessed at once that the stranger was waiting there for the person to come to him whom he had hastened to that house to see.

At the same instant that he came to his conclusion he heard a light quick step along the upper hall as of a person approaching the stairs, and realizing that he had only a moment in which to act, he glided swiftly through the lower hall to the small room at the end of it, which in turn gave upon the back parlor of the house through a narrow door which stood open.

As he reached it and stepped out of sight from the hall, he turned and saw Olga Dovanief step across it and enter the parlor where the man was waiting.

It is not a pleasant thing for a man of Nick Carter's delicacy of feeling to play the eavesdropper and listen to a private conversation between two persons, unless there is previous knowledge that the talk will have something directly to do with a crime that has been committed or is contemplated, or with the criminals who are concerned in one or the other.

Nick had no knowledge that this was an occasion of that kind; indeed if appearances were criterions for his direction, this interview promised to be distinctly of a personal nature, and Nick instantly determined to make his presence known at once.

He turned about to do so, and was on the point of passing in through the hall to the parlor door, when he heard the voices of the two people approaching through the parlor toward the rear room, and he waited an instant, thinking to present himself to them there through the small door that connected with the hall-room that has already been mentioned.

He turned again, intending to step at once into the back parlor, and believing that the instant he appeared Olga would understand why he had come and make unnecessary any scene which might have ensued otherwise.

But as he was about to show himself he heard in the deep tones of the man that which caused him to hesitate and draw back again out of sight while he awaited Olga's reply.

The remark of the stranger which Nick had overheard was only the last part of what he had been saying; it was:

"——to frighten you, Olga, but to warn you that appearances show that you have been playing fast and loose with us, and the time has come when those who should know are not certain to whom you really give your allegiance. This detective whom you have captured knows too much, and your interference this morning to have his life spared was unauthorized as well as extremely foolish on your part. You only place your own life in jeopardy by such conduct; and the death of a man like Nick Carter is of no more moment in affairs such as ours than a grain of sand on the seashore."

Olga replied, saying:

"The man whom they have in their power, and whom they would have murdered in cold blood if I had not interfered, is not Nick Carter."

"No? Who is he then?" exclaimed the stranger.

"He is a man whom Orloff's followers captured by mistake, believing him to be the detective."

"But who is he, Olga? Is he not a detective himself?"

"Yes," she replied, with apparent reluctance.

"And is he not more or less aware of our proceedings in this country? Of what is going on among our people?"

"Yes," she answered again.

"Then, why should you interfere? What is this man to you? What do you care if one or one hundred and one of these American pigs are put to death because they get in our way?"

"I am human," she responded.

Nick could almost see the man shrug his shoulders as she made this reply, and he did hear him laugh harshly.

"There are times, Mademoiselle Olga," the stranger said coldly, "when you are almost too human for your own good. But we will dismiss the matter of this prisoner, for I have taken charge of that affair myself and have given my orders, which will be carried out to the letter. You and I have some more important things to discuss at the present moment."

"Wait," she said sharply. "Before we discuss them, have you directed that this man who was captured at Nick Carter's house last night be murdered?"

*See No. 559 of NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

"I have ordered that he be put to death; you may call it by what name you please."

Nick had stepped forward a little bit so that he could now see into the room, and was watching Olga when she replied with flashing eyes:

"And I say, Strovanoff, that it shall not be!"

The tall stranger shrugged his shoulders and smiled coldly, showing his white teeth as he asked in a voice that was so softly spoken that it was almost a caress:

"Do you venture to defy me, Olga? To defy Strovanoff? Do you realize the danger in which you stand when you dare to speak to me as you have done just now?"

She drew a little bit farther away from him and Nick detected for one instant a gleam of fear in her eyes, and he did not wonder at it, for the name of Strovanoff had carried terror to many braver hearts than hers; but she answered him boldly:

"I dare even Strovanoff; even you, unscrupulous and implacable as you are, when I believe the cause I uphold is right! And I say to you now, no matter what the consequences may be, that if you carry out what you have threatened to do, and put to death this man who is in your power, you will get no further service from Olga Dovanief!"

"What!" he exclaimed. "You dare? You defy me?"

"Yes," she returned boldly, "I do!"

There was something suggestive of the grin of a wolf in the smile that swept across the Russian's face at this, and he remarked in that same soft and purring voice:

"Defiance of Strovanoff is a serious thing, Olga, for it is defiance of everything that I represent, as well as of me. Refusal to serve me further is refusal to serve our cause, and that implies that you are ready to become a traitor, and means death."

Olga was perceptibly paler now, but she looked him calmly in the eyes as she replied:

"And still I defy you, Strovanoff, for on my soul I believe you to be a traitor yourself!"

The smile on the man's face changed to a snarl, and, with the quickness of a cat, he darted forward and seized her wrists in both hands, grinning into her now thoroughly frightened face.

And it was at that instant that Nick Carter stepped swiftly forward and confronted them both, remarking coolly as he did so:

"Good morning, Olga; who is this person who has the appearance of a gentleman and the manners of a cur?"

CHAPTER IX.

STROVANOFF, THE NIHILIST CHIEF.

Strovanoff started back and released his hold upon Olga for an instant, dismayed by the interference and the character of it; but he recovered his remarkable composure instantly while he fixed his cold eyes searchingly on the detective.

Olga, the instant she was released from the grasp that had been upon her, leaped backward and away from Strovanoff, so that as the three stood there in the center of the room, they formed the three points of a triangle.

Nick had forgotten for the moment the fact that he had quite materially changed his appearance, but now as he recalled it, he raised his hand swiftly, tore away the false mustache and dropped it negligently into one of his pockets.

"Mr. Carter!" exclaimed Olga, and she was the first to speak after Nick's surprising salutation.

"At your service," replied the detective, bowing his head slightly, but keeping his eyes upon the tall stranger, who at that moment had every aspect of a panther, ready to spring and tear.

"Ah," said Strovanoff, raising one hand and stroking his military mustache, "I recognize you now; you are the man who uttered the name of Mademoiselle Dovanief when I passed you on the street in the lower part of the city."

"Your shrewdness does you credit, Strovanoff," replied Nick, and the Russian started.

"So," he said, and there was something threatening even in the utterance of that one word, "you know who I am, do you?"

"Certainly," replied the detective.

"It is rather a dangerous knowledge to possess, my man, unless our friend Olga can satisfy me that you are one of us."

Nick smiled broadly upon the Russian and responded:

"I am afraid, Strovanoff, that you did not hear Miss Dovanief when she mentioned my name just now; I am the Nick Carter whom you were just discussing with her."

Strovanoff clenched his hands tightly and his eyes narrowed to slits, but he spoke with perfect calmness:

"You have been eavesdropping like a common spy?" he demanded.

"I have overheard a part of your conversation."

"And you have followed me, I suppose, since the moment you passed me on the street?"

"I have followed you," replied Nick evasively, "it does not matter since when."

"So you have, perhaps, been on my track all the morning; possibly ever since I arrived in the country."

Nick smiled again, as much as to say that it was quite possible, although he made no reply, but after a moment of silence he said:

"I am not interested particularly in your affairs, Strovanoff, although I feel a distinct interest in you just at the present moment. I know that you are no safer in this country than you are in your own, for there is more than one serious charge against you right here in the city of New York; but I have heard your statement to Miss Dovanief to the effect that you have ordered the death of my first assistant and best friend, who happens at the moment to be in your power, and so to make matters even I shall give myself the pleasure of placing you under arrest at once, so that you may be given an opportunity to answer for some of the crimes you have committed."

Strovanoff took one step backward, as if to place a greater distance between himself and the detective, and he replied coolly:

"You talk largely, Mr. Nicholas Carter."

"I speak to the point," replied the detective.

"You say it is your intention to place me under arrest?"

"Yes."

"And then—and may I ask what you intend to do with me then?"

He was smiling as if he had no fear of the outcome of the present scene.

"I intend," replied Nick, who understood him perfectly well, "to take you to the headquarters of police and to inform the district attorney by telephone that I have captured Strovanoff. I think this is all I will have to do; the district attorney will do the rest."

Strovanoff, who had held his hands in plain view all the time and who had continued to stroke his mustache idly, sought his coat pocket with his left hand. But instantly Nick spoke to him.

"Don't move your hands, Strovanoff," he said sharply. "If you pull a weapon, you'll get hurt. I've got you covered, as we call it, through my pocket," and Nick half-raised his right hand, which was in the pocket of his coat, showing plainly that he was thoroughly prepared for any emergency that might arise.

Strovanoff shrugged his shoulders.

"I was only seeking a cigarette," he said.

"We will dispense with smoking for the present, Strovanoff."

If the Russian appreciated the fact that he was at so great a disadvantage, he did not manifest it by any outward sign, for he was apparently as cool as he had been at any part of this short interview.

And now he replied:

"As you please, of course, and as you seem for the moment to have the upper hand, although I doubt—really I do, Mr. Carter—that the hand in your pocket contains a pistol, as you say it does."

"You can very easily find out the truth."

"Yes?"

"If you make any move to draw a weapon or to attempt to escape from me, I will not kill you, Strovanoff, but I will put a bullet through the arm you move, which I fancy will be quite as effective."

"And also exceedingly uncomfortable," said Strovanoff with a shrug. "I pray, sir, that you will not be so violent."

"Olga," said Nick, addressing her calmly by her given name, "this man just threatened you; I heard him and I saw him do it. Are you of such a forgiving disposition that you would like me to set him at liberty?"

"Pardon me," interrupted Strovanoff before Olga could reply, "but in order to set me at liberty, Mr. Carter, you must first make me a captive; I am not aware that you have done so yet."

"Answer me, Olga," said Nick, ignoring Strovanoff's words.

"I don't care what becomes of him," she said; "I wish he were dead; he is a withering blight to the cause he pretends to serve; he is a traitor to every person he knows or who knows him; he is a constant menace to everything that is good, and upholds all that is evil; he murders indiscriminately, destroying lives where'er he will without question and by an authority which he claims to possess I know not how; and through it all"—she turned now and looked squarely into the face of Strovanoff—"through it all, Strovanoff, I believe you to be at heart a traitor to the cause and a paid spy and servant of the czar!"

"I think," said Nick coolly, "that you have answered me. Don't move, Strovanoff, I am watching you, and I appreciate very well, indeed, how closely those remarks

of Olga's have cut. Don't move unless you want a broken arm or leg. Now, Olga."

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

Nick withdrew his left hand from his coat pocket—not the hand he had partly raised with which he had threatened Strovanoff, but the other, and in the grasp of it, as he extended it toward Olga, jingled a pair of steel handcuffs.

"Take them," he said to her.

She started back with frightened eyes and a gasp of amazement when she saw what it was that he held out to her.

"Why?" she exclaimed, "what am I to do with them?"

"Take them," he repeated.

She did so reluctantly, holding them gingerly between her fingers so that the lower one of the two swung to and fro like a pendulum.

"What am I to do with them?" she repeated.

Nick Carter smiled broadly.

"Ask Strovanoff to put his hands behind him so that you can snap them on his wrists."

She stared at Nick for a moment as if she did not comprehend what he had said to her, then she looked at the handcuffs she held between her fingers, and then she raised her eyes to Strovanoff's face, and saw that the Russian was smiling upon her apparently utterly unmoved by the exigency of the situation. It was evident to Nick Carter that the man had no fear that Olga Dovanief would dare to obey the request, and it was also evident that he had no intention of putting his hands behind him to be handcuffed, even though he were commanded to do so at the point of a pistol.

But now the detective withdrew his right hand from his pocket, discovering to the Russian the truth of the statement that he held a pistol in his grasp ready for instant use.

"Put your hands behind you, Strovanoff," he ordered sharply.

The Russian did not move.

He returned Nick Carter's gaze as coldly and as determinedly as the detective's own.

"Put your hands behind you," repeated Nick.

Slowly the Russian moved his hands as if he were about to obey the command, but even as he did so, and when they had almost reached the point where they would pass behind his back, he took a chance which Nick Carter could not help but admire in him, and launched his body forward with a sudden spring, which was as quick and unerring and almost as powerful as a panther's might have been.

If Nick Carter had chosen to discharge his weapon he might easily have shot the man, but relying, as he believed he could do, upon his own great strength, he released his hold upon the pistol, which was dragged back into his sleeve by the elastic spring attached to it, and as Strovanoff leaped upon him, seized the man with a well-known ju-jutsu hold and hurled him crashing to the floor at the opposite side of the room.

But even as he did so—even as he turned to pursue his advantage and to make the schemer effectually a prisoner, three men dashed into the parlor from the other outer hallway and came toward them on a run, shouting exclamations in Russian as they did so.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE POINT OF A DAGGER.

In moments of emergency the mind thinks very quickly, and no sooner had the men appeared upon the scene and dashed toward him as they did, than Nick understood the coolness and self-assurance of Strovanoff during the interview that had just taken place.

The nihilist chief had only been seeking to kill time in order to await the arrival of these men, whom he doubtless expected; whom he had probably directed to meet him there at that house.

There were three of them, and they appeared so suddenly and rushed forward so quickly that they were upon Nick before he could recover from the exertion he had made in throwing Strovanoff across the room.

Nor did the detective have an opportunity to throw his weapon back into his hand from its place of concealment in his sleeve.

The interruption was so entirely unexpected and Nick was as much taken by surprise as he ever had been in his career.

In an instant they hurled themselves upon him and bore him to the floor despite his struggles, and although he succeeded in choking one of them into insensibility, and to wrench the arm of a second until it hung useless at the man's side, he was, nevertheless, overcome, and in less time than it takes to describe it, found himself lying

flat on his back on the floor with Strovanoff bending over him, holding the point of a dagger against his throat.

"There has been a shifting of the scene, Mr. Carter," said the Russian calmly and apparently none the worse for his recent rough experience.

"So it would appear," replied the detective, as coolly as he had spoken; and at the same instant he glanced past the men who surrounded him and observed that Olga, who was behind them all, was making rapid signs to him to lie quietly and submissively where he was.

Strovanoff looked down upon him with the wolfish smile curling his lips and continued:

"It seems now that we will have two for our evening sacrifice, and I cannot tell you how overjoyed I am that I have succeeded in getting Nick Carter certainly in my power."

The detective made no reply.

"You see, Carter," continued the man easily, "you know altogether too much about me for my welfare in this country, and that is why I ordered the death of the other man, supposing him to be you; but now that I can have both of you put out of the way so readily and so easily, I am almost inclined to finish with you here and now—and I would, only for the evidence that such an act would leave here of the commission of a crime."

All this time he kept the point of his weapon pressed so closely to the detective's throat that it broke the skin, and Nick knew that if he moved or made any effort to escape from his present predicament, the dagger would be driven through his neck instantly.

Beside Strovanoff stood one of the men who had made the attack upon him, and opposite them stood another, he with the useless arm, and slowly arising from the floor, still dazed by the violence of the choking he had received, was the other. Olga had withdrawn as far away from them as possible, while she could still retain a view of Nick Carter's face and occasionally catch the glance of his eyes.

"Olga," called Strovanoff sharply.

"Well?" she replied.

"Come here, girl."

She moved forward until she stood beside the man with the useless arm.

"What do you want?" she asked of Strovanoff.

"Ah," he said, "I see you still retain possession of those steel bracelets the detective gave to you. They are w... I want."

She raised them slowly in her hand and extended them across Nick Carter's body toward the nihilist chief, but he shook his head smilingly.

"Oh, no," he said. "I want you to use them."

"I?"

"Yes."

"In what manner?"

"I wish you to adjust them to the detective as he would have you fix them upon me."

She looked at the Russian inquiringly, still with her outstretched hand holding the handcuffs, and in that instant Nick somehow sensed the idea that Olga was preparing to make a decided move in his behalf; what it would be he did not know, but he instantly prepared himself for anything that might occur.

"You wish me to fasten these upon the detective's wrists?" asked Olga of Strovanoff.

"Yes; he told you to snap them on my wrists; put them on his own," and then he added: "Put your hands together, Carter," and as he did so he pressed the point of his weapon into the detective's neck until it drew a bright spot of blood, which glistened like a bead against his skin.

Olga bent down slowly, nearer to the prostrate detective, and all the while she kept her eyes steadily upon Strovanoff, so that a disinterested party watching her and understanding her might have thought that she was pretending a terror of the man that she did not feel.

In truth, she was watching her opportunity, for, as a matter of fact, she had already decided what she would do, and the decision had come to her in that moment when she first stretched out her hands with the manacles in her grasp toward the nihilist chief.

"Do you intend to murder this man?" she demanded of Strovanoff, in a low tone.

It was apparently a useless question, under the circumstances, but, nevertheless, it tickled the fancy of the nihilist, for he replied with another of his wolfish smiles:

"I certainly do."

"And the other one, also?" she asked.

"And the other one, also; they shall die together."

"It is because you hate this man personally, isn't it, Strovanoff, and not because of any enmity he feels toward our cause?"

of it."

"If you prefer it that way, yes," was the cool reply.

"Don't you, who are our chief, know that it is against the rules of our society to kill for personal vengeance?"

"I am the society, and I am the rules, Olga."

"And you would murder this man because you hate him?"

"If you will have it so, yes."

"Not because he is an enemy of the cause?" she repeated again, as if she wished the truth of these conditions to sink into the minds of the others who were present and listening.

"Enough, Olga!" said Strovanoff savagely. "You have said quite enough; it is not for you to question anything I do or why I do it. I am the chief and you are the servant, and you are sworn to obey me. Put those irons on the detective's wrists."

She bent forward still lower over the detective, as if she was about to comply with the demand, and she held one of the handcuffs firmly in her grasp while the other dangled from it, thus making a chain forming an effective weapon if one chose to use it as such.

As she bent forward closer she moved her hand backward a little, thus swinging the lower one of the two steel bracelets, and then, with sudden energy, she swung her arm like lightning, so that the lower one of the two implements crashed against the dagger that Strovanoff was holding against Nick's throat. It was a dangerous experiment for Olga to have attempted, for the slightest miscalculation in the aim of her blow or the affectiveness, or in the force with which it was applied, would have meant the instant death of the detective, or at least a savage wound which would certainly have resulted in his death.

But Olga had been cool and collected throughout it all.

From the moment when she made her decision as to what she would attempt to do, she had gone about it as methodically as she would have performed any trivial duty of the day, and when the blow fell, it came quickly and truly.

The dagger was knocked from Strovanoff's hand, and so near was it to the life of the detective that the point scratched his skin and drew blood even as the weapon was severed in half and was sent flying to the other side of the room.

And the hand of the Russian was stung by the sharp blow that Olga had delivered, and that, together with his utter amazement at Olga's act, provided the least possible instant of opportunity which Nick Carter required in which to act.

Lying on the floor on his back during this scene and studying the faces of Olga and Strovanoff, he had been able almost to read her eyes, and, therefore, he was in a measure prepared for what happened.

The instant the blow fell he acted.

Strovanoff was bent down so closely over him that he was within reach of the detective's arm, and the instant that Olga acted Nick struck outward and upward with his right fist, catching Strovanoff on the point of the chin and sending him staggering backward so that he almost missed his balance.

It was an interval which could not have been measured by time, but it was sufficient for the detective to regain his feet, and he was just well upon them when all four of the men who were in that room rushed forward to a second attack upon him.

The nearest was the man with the one useless arm, and he was knocked senseless with a single blow of Nick Carter's fist.

The next who came easily within Nick's reach as the blow was struck was the man who had been choked, and him the detective seized, raised from the floor, and threw bodily at the others, carrying them back against the wall as if they were nine-pins.

But in the meantime Strovanoff had found time to act. He evidently came suddenly to the conclusion that it would be hopeless to offer further combat to the detective, who had already given them proof of his ability to overcome them, now that he was in a position where he could make use of his great strength and science.

As Nick Carter hurled that man toward them, carrying the others backward against the wall, Strovanoff managed to elude the consequences of that act, and, leaping nimbly to one side, he seized Olga in his arms.

And then, as the detective turned to pursue them, the nihilist chief crossed the room in two bounds to the pier-glass, which extended from floor to ceiling at one end of it, and almost before the detective realized what was happening, he had worked some secret mechanism that was there and disappeared behind the mirror with Olga Dovanieff in his arms, and then, as Nick paused in amazement at the spectacle of the pier-glass gliding back to its former position, two of the men attacked him again from behind.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER FINDS A NEW ASSISTANT.

There was very little fight left in these two men who remained to continue the fight with Nick Carter, for it must be remembered that one of them on the floor was senseless where he had been struck down by the detective's fist, and the other had been used rather badly where he had been hurled across the room and used as a battering-ram.

Nick shook them from his shoulders with something of the angry impatience that a big dog would have manifested toward a couple of curs that were snarling around, and he laid one of them low with a blow of his left arm, and clapped the handcuffs that Olga had used so effectively upon the other one.

And now he pulled some pictures from the walls and utilized the cords with which they had been suspended to bind the others, and this done, he gave his attention to the movable pier-glass past which Strovanoff had disappeared carrying Olga with him.

It was one of Nick Carter's talents that he was almost always able to discover secret springs and entrances to mysterious passageways, for it was a part of his profession to make an intricate and thorough study of such things.

But search as he might, he could not discover the secret of this one, and, convinced of that, he presently turned back to his captives. One of them, the man who wore the handcuffs, seemed rather more intelligent in appearance than the others, and Nick shoved him back into a chair and tied him there so that he could not move.

Then, adopting his sternest and most threatening manner, for he knew that nothing else would make an impression upon such a man as this, he said to him, in Russian:

"I am going to ask you some questions which I want you to answer. If you tell me the truth and tell it readily, without reservation, it will be well for you; if you lie to me or deceive me or withhold any information that I demand, it will be exceedingly ill for you. You are a Russian and I know how to punish Russians, and I will know how to punish you if you make it necessary for me to do so."

The man looked at him sullenly, and did not reply.

Nick pointed toward the pier-glass.

"Do you know the secret of the working of that glass door?" he asked.

"No," was the reply. "I didn't know it was there till Strovanoff used it."

"Whose house is this?" said Nick. "Who lives here?"

"Dovanieff lived here part of the time. Prince Michael Orloff part of the time. Strovanoff was coming here to live to-day."

"Who else?"

"No one else lived here all the time, but the house is always open to the members of our society."

"What is that society."

"Do you mean that you want the name of it?"

"What is the name of your society?"

"It is called the Brotherhood of Free Russians."

"Is it a branch of nihilism?"

"As you understand nihilism, it is."

"It is a political organization, of course?"

"Unquestionably."

"And, like all revolutionary societies of Russia, deals in the explosion of bombs and indiscriminate murder; it would seem so from what I have observed to-day."

"You heard Mademoiselle Olga state the belief of our brotherhood," was the calm reply.

"Your society believes, then, in killing wherever it is necessary for what you deem the 'good of the cause'?"

"It does."

"It does not approve of murder for personal vengeance?"

"Not at all, and the man who commits such an act is supposed to sacrifice his own life by doing so."

"Then, according to what you say, Strovanoff, and you, also, because you have assisted him, have forfeited your own lives this day for the attempt to murder me."

"You are not dead yet," was the reply uttered so calmly that Nick could not repress a smile.

"No," he said, "I am very far from dead yet, as you and your nihilist friends will discover; and now I want to ask you: Do you know to whom reference was made when they spoke of my assistant, the other man who was a prisoner and whom Strovanoff has condemned to death?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he has been injured?"

"He was safe and well, although rather uncomfortable, four hours ago."

"How do you know?" asked Nick.

"Because I saw him."

"Where?"

"In this house."

"In this house? In what part of this house?"

"In this room."

"Are you lying to me?"

"No, I am telling you the truth. I don't believe in the death of that man."

"Where is he now, then?"

"I don't know."

"Where would you suppose that he might be now?"

"I have no more idea about that than you have, sir, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"I have no more idea than you have where your friend may be at this moment, unless he was carried from this room through the same secret entrance that Strovanoff has just made use of."

"Is it true that this is the first knowledge that you have had of this secret entrance?"

"It is."

"Do these other men know about it?"

"I don't know, but I think not."

"How did it happen that you and your friends arrived here at just the opportune moment to-day?"

"We came in response to an order given us by Strovanoff, who had directed that we come here at a certain time; we arrived exactly on the minute; we had no idea of your presence, or that there would be any trouble, still less a fight in these parlors."

"Is Strovanoff your chief?"

"He is the chief of our section of the brotherhood."

"And what is your section of the brotherhood?"

"I could not explain that to you without violating my oath, and that I will not do, even if you kill me."

"I won't ask you to do that, my man. I never do it myself, and I never expect it of others."

"Thank you, sir."

"But I am to understand that you and the others of your brotherhood who are here in this country at the present time are under the orders of Strovanoff; is that true?"

"It is only too true, sir. He has over us the power of life and death."

"You were foolish to give any man the power over you."

And the man bowed his head and replied humbly:

"All men are more or less foolish, Mr. Carter."

"Have you affection in your heart for this man Strovanoff?"

The gleam that came into the man's eyes at this question was sufficient answer to the detective, and the man replied:

"I hate him and despise him, but I am compelled to obey him by my oath."

"Do you believe that he is true to you and to the brotherhood to which you belong?" asked Nick. "I ask the question because I heard Olga Dovanief call him a traitor to his face."

"There are those who suspect that he is a traitor," was the calm reply. "But there has never been proof of it."

"Tell me about Olga Dovanief," said the detective.

"What do you wish me to tell you about her?"

"Have you and other members of your brotherhood had affection for her?"

"We love her. We adore her. We would obey her blindly."

"Don't you realize now, then, that having fallen into Strovanoff's power, after what has occurred in this room to-day, that she is in imminent danger of her life?"

"I realize only too well that if he has not already killed her, he may do so at any moment, or——"

"Go on," said Nick.

"Strovanoff has for more than two years besought Olga to become his wife. He has pleaded with her, threatened her, and has even gone to the extent of informing against her in the Inner Circle of the brotherhood, until those who are higher in authority are in doubt concerning her loyalty to our cause, and sooner or later Strovanoff will force her to marry him or will have caused her death. He is in this country even now only because of her, for his duty to the brotherhood and the cause should have detained him in Russia."

"Then," said Nick, "if I understand you, my man, nihilist though you are, sworn member of the Brotherhood of Free Russians, as you assert, and a man who will not violate his oath, yet you would hesitate at nothing less than the betrayal of it to protect Olga Dovanief from the power of Strovanoff. Am I right?"

"You are right, sir, and I don't know but I would almost go to the extent of violating my oath in Olga Dovanief's defense."

Nick stared at the man a moment, and, reading entire sincerity in his face, he stepped forward and cut the

bonds that held him in the chair, unlocked the handcuffs from his wrists and dropped them into his pocket, and then drew back again under the astonished gaze of the man he had liberated.

"You are free," said Nick Carter.

The man rose slowly to his feet, still unbelieving, and then trembling with eagerness, he half-whispered:

"Do you mean it, sir?"

"Certainly I mean it; you have spoken like a man, and now that you are free I ask your services to help me to rescue Olga Dovanief from the power of Strovanoff, and to find and save the life of my assistant, who is also in his power."

For just one instant the man hesitated, and then, raising his right hand over his head, he clenched his fist and replied:

"I will aid you, sir, to the utmost limit of my ability!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOMB EXPLODES.

Nick Carter had demonstrated his powers in the management of men by the attitude he assumed toward this one who was willing to give him every assistance in his power; and now that he trusted the man utterly, he directed him to wait where he was for a moment, and then dashed out of the room and down the stairs to the basement of the house, where he searched for and found what he most desired at that moment—an ax.

Returning with it to the rear parlor of the house where so much had occurred in so short a space of time, he found the man waiting as he had left him, although it was evident he had been conversing with his companions, who were still bound upon the floor, during the absence of the detective.

Nick paused for a moment, with the ax in his hand, and said inquiringly:

"Well, what is it?"

"I have been talking with my friends, here," the man replied.

"Well, go on; what of it?"

"They overheard our conversation."

"Naturally," said Nick.

"They ask you, through me, to set them free, in order that they, too, may be of assistance in what is to follow."

Nick turned and looked at them for a moment and then again to the man he had decided to trust.

"Can we depend upon them?" he asked.

"Yes; as surely as you may depend upon me."

"Good," said the detective; "release them."

Then, without a backward glance, he crossed the floor to the pier-glass, and, with a savage blow delivered with all his strength, he sent the edge of the ax deep into the wall just at the edge of the frame of the mirror; and the force of the blow shattered the glass into a thousand pieces, so that it fell rattling to the floor about them, disclosing merely the rough-board backing with which such mirrors are usually provided.

Raising the ax again, Nick struck a second blow, this time with the back of the ax directly in the center of the rough boards already described, splintering them, and, with one single blow, driving one of them entirely loose into a wide space that was behind and beyond.

Two more blows quickly delivered effectually opened the way into the secret passage, for there stood revealed before them not any stairs leading downward or upward, as is usually the case in such an arrangement, but a long narrow corridor, which passed between the walls toward the westerly side of the house.

"Good," said Nick, "at least we have found a passageway."

He passed along it swiftly, producing his electric torch as he did so, and flashing the light ahead of him.

The passage was a short one, not more than twenty-five feet in extent altogether, and it ended abruptly as it had begun, presumably directly behind another pier-glass of the same pattern which decorated the back parlor of the adjoining house. Here the detective discovered at once the rough boarding such as he had already demolished in the house recently left, and his light at the same instant flashed upon a wooden latch which he had only to touch to dislodge the frame, and which was doubtless worked by the same sort of secret mechanism from the other side as that which Strovanoff had employed in making his escape.

The men were close behind the detective when he discovered this latch and released it, and instantly Nick pushed the door—if a door it could be called—into the room ahead of him, swinging it around so violently that it came forcibly in contact with some impediment that stood in the way, and smashed the mirror of which it was composed.

The sound of the crashing glass as it fell to the floor was almost drowned by shouts of dismay that came from people who were inside that room, and as Nick leaped

through the opening into the parlor, he found himself confronted by Strovanoff, who had darted forward to intercept him.

In the first brief glance that the detective had of the interior of the room, he discovered that he had unwittingly come upon one of the meeting-places of the Russian nihilists who foregather in New York. And he discovered, also, that besides Strovanoff, there were half a dozen other men in the room.

Across it and over against the wall, standing with her hands behind her, as if they were bound, and facing the men who were gathered there, was Olga Dovanief, white faced, but with flashing eyes and defiant attitude and spirit, as if she had indeed come to her last resource and stood now in imminent danger of her life, although her spirit was unbroken and her courage untamed.

Near her, lying at full length upon the floor and bound from head to foot with a stout rope that had been wound around him again and again, was Chick; but it was Chick alive and well and uninjured, although helpless and incapable of defending himself.

All these things Nick Carter discovered at a glance, and in the instant he passed through the secret doorway into the room.

With the next instant his fist had shot forward and caught Strovanoff squarely upon the point of the chin, lifting him from his feet and propelling him backward as if he were a projectile from a catapult, and shoving his head against the plastered wall with such force that he fell quivering and trembling to the floor unconscious and inert.

The men who had been in the room with Strovanoff and had doubtless been debating with him upon the fate of Olga, against whom the nihilist chief had made serious charges, were paralyzed for a moment by the sudden bursting into the room of Nick Carter, followed by the men he had so fortunately enlisted in his behalf.

It was not until they saw their chief hurled ignominiously against the wall, as has already been described, that they partially recovered from their amazement and consternation and turned to resist the attack that had been made upon them.

But Nick Carter had already seized upon the second man of that group, and, having grasped him by both hands, was forcing him to his knees, while the man was crying out with pain lest the bones of his arm should be broken by the terrible pressure the detective put upon them.

It was the man who had been so ready to enlist himself under Nick Carter's banner who did, perhaps, the most effective work during those first few seconds of the fight, for he successfully dodged past the men who opposed them, and with a few quick slashes of a knife he held in his hand he liberated Olga and also Chick from the bonds which confined them.

It was the most effective service that could have been performed, for the reason that it made the opposing parties almost equal in strength, that is, in strength of numbers.

The nihilists who were gathered in that room seemed to act as if for the moment they believed themselves back in Russia, and having been interrupted during the proceedings of one of their secret meetings, could expect no mercy whatever from those who attacked them.

For in Russia, whenever a nest of nihilists is uncovered and the officers of the law or members of the secret police descend upon it, the members of the Russian revolutionary society who are gathered there fight like cornered rats, for they know that having been discovered in the very act of inciting rebellion, and plotting against the throne, the opportunity will be absolutely their last one.

Once a nihilist is arrested under such circumstances, he is hurried away to solitary confinement in a dungeon of one of the fortresses, and thus takes the first stage of his journey toward frozen Siberia.

And if there be not sufficient evidence against him to convict openly of plotting against the throne, the necessary "proof" is quickly and easily manufactured, and he has no more opportunity of obtaining what we in our own country call justice than one of the aforesaid rats would have if brought to bay in the corner of a cellar surrounded by a horde of cats.

Men fight desperately under such circumstances, and the strength of many becomes focussed into one; and now knives flashed in the air, although strangely enough there was not a firearm drawn by any one of the men.

While Nick was bending back the wrists of the man he now held and thus forcing him to the floor, another of the Russians sprang full upon his back and wound his arms around the detective's neck and his legs around his body, tearing and choking with his fingers and kicking with his heels, and all the time trying to force Nick Carter to the floor beneath him.

And it seemed as if he would succeed, notwithstanding the detective's great strength, for in a moment another of

the nihilists, perceiving the temporary advantage, dashed to the fellow's assistance, and by plunging forward caught Nick Carter by the ankles and so tripped him.

It was at this instant that, unseen by the others—that is, by all the others save Olga herself—Strovanoff shuddered, raised himself upon one elbow, and then slowly staggered to his feet, while at the same instant he reached out toward a shelf that was fastened to the wall near him, and, plunging his hand into a jardinère that rested upon it, uttered a cry of exultation as he drew it forth, holding aloft in his grasp one of those terrible bombs which are so murderous in their awful consequences.

It was Olga who saw him do this act, and who realized what it portended. Chick saw it also, but, having been bound so long a time and so tightly that his circulation had been impeded, he was as yet incapable of taking part in the struggle, and he had already fruitlessly attempted more than once to get upon his feet.

But Olga saw the act, and knew what it meant.

She knew that driven to desperation, Strovanoff would not hesitate to cast the bomb, no matter whom it killed, even if he himself became one of its victims. She shrieked aloud just as Nick Carter, by the exercise of his wonderful strength, succeeded in getting upon his feet, leaving one of the men who had attacked him insensible upon the floor, while he held the other by the throat at arm's length.

He, too, saw and understood in that instant what was about to occur.

He saw Strovanoff holding the bomb aloft, and he knew that in another instant it would be exploded.

He heard Olga's cry of warning, and he saw her leap forward, regardless of her own safety, toward Strovanoff, as if she would oppose her own frail strength to his and tear the bomb from him before he could explode it.

But even the dropping of it to the floor meant death and destruction to all who were in that room, and Nick with a last convulsive squeeze upon the throat of the man he was holding at arm's length, dropped him as if he were a wet rag, and also dashed forward toward the impending doom.

He heard Strovanoff's loud laugh of defiance, and saw the maniacal blaze in the nihilist chief's eyes; he saw Olga leap into the air, with her right hand outstretched to seize the bomb and tear it from Strovanoff's grasp.

He saw her reach it and the fingers of her hand close over it; but she grasped it only partially, for at that instant, with another cry of almost fiendish exultation, Strovanoff managed, by using the muscles of his wrist, to toss the implement of death into the air toward the ceiling, it being evidently his intention to explode it there over their heads so that the force of the terrible implement would be downward.

And then Nick Carter performed an act which he had learned in his early youth in playing handball.

He did not know if the force of the blow he dealt the bomb might explode it, and it is certain that he did not stop to think of it, but he leaped forward as the thing was falling again toward the floor and dealt it a blow from the open palm of his outstretched hand, catching it in midair and so deflecting and accelerating its course, that it flew like a shot from a cannon straight through one of the windows of the room, fortunately striking it directly in the center of one of the glass panes.

Neither the blow of Nick's hand against it nor the impact with the frail glass was sufficient to explode it; but the instant that followed the crashing of glass there came a deafening roar from the outside where the bomb struck the flagstones of the yard behind the house, and a perfect volcano of fire and smoke and deadly fumes shot into the air, while an enormous hole was torn in the ground where the missile had struck.

The fight was over with that explosion.

Strovanoff, who had made use of the last bit of strength that he could muster in his effort to explode the bomb in the room, sank fainting to the floor again, and it only remained for Nick Carter to call upon the policemen, who were attracted there by the noise, to assist him in getting his prisoners to the station-house.

To the man who had so opportunely assisted him, he said hurriedly:

"For what you have done, make your escape with the two who are with you as quickly as you can," and he purposely kept his eyes away from Olga Dovanief, nor was he disappointed or regretful when he found, a little later, that she, too, had disappeared.

It is sufficient to say that Strovanoff was taken to the Tombs, and that the men who were with him in that room, meditating upon the destruction of Olga and Chick, were also sent to jail to await trial.

THE END.

The next number—561—of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain, besides the usual departments, a long complete story, entitled "The Brotherhood of Free Russia; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Friend, Olga."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

In China beggars at once attract a stranger's attention. Around every corner, along canals and creeks, in market-places, at the city gates, both outside and inside, and especially in the temple yards, there are beggars here, beggars there, and beggars everywhere, and a more pitiable sight one cannot meet. Many of them are crippled or afflicted with leprosy, and all are dressed literally in rags.

I made a trip in a house-boat to Soochow, moving through the numerous canals in the city and stopping when I wished to take a view. I landed by a clean, fresh-painted large yamen, spotlessly white, with blue-black tiles on the roof, and placed my camera against the wall to photograph a big pagoda on the other side of the canal. The usual Chinese crowd soon came around me, and not a few beggars. I asked an intelligent young Chinaman, through my interpreter, who lived in this fine big mansion, so unusually well kept for a Chinese house. I was not a little astonished when I was told the beggar chief of Soochow.

This led me to make inquiry about the system of begging in China, which is wonderfully well organized under a scheme that works admirably and is, of course, very ancient, like all other institutions in the Middle Kingdom. The chief has a fine residence, concubines by the half-dozen, and very fine clothing, and he is seen in the best of society, but only where he is not known. As a mark of his dignity he moves about with a long stick, which is allowed him by the city authorities. He also has the power of life and death over his beggarly subjects, and punishes all offenses committed by them.

The beggar chief is a regular attendant at the marriage ceremonies and funeral processions of private families, in order to get his pay for keeping away his hungry crowd of beggars, who otherwise would hinder the festival or procession in a disagreeable, noisy way. I was told that the beggar chief of Soochow has an income of about $15,000 a year. The billet of the one in Shanghai city is worth about $5,000. Most storekeepers have an agreement with the beggar chief to keep his staff away. They pay about $1 a year each, and in return for this trifling amount the chief gives a printed receipt to the storekeeper, which the latter pastes on his door, to the effect that he has paid his tax and is exempt from the demands of beggars.

There are different kinds of beggars. Imperial beggars, or *lao yen ting*—the words mean "old man's button"—have probably no parallel in the world, as some of them are descendants of the ancient Ming dynasty or distinctly related to the present reigning imperial house. They are scattered all over the country, are said to number upward of 10,000, and are specially numerous in Peking. Imperial beggars are easily recognized, because they are allowed to wear garments of the imperial yellow of different shades. Characters are painted in black on the back and front of their robes to denote their profession. They wear either a straw hat or a velvet cap ornamented with a brass button.

When first I saw them I took them to be old degraded officials, for there are hundreds of them in Soochow. They carry a wooden bell in their hands to announce their arrival. As a rule they are over sixty years of age and have no family to support them, and they are all allowed to beg for more money than the ordinary craft, and are furnished with a license from the magistrate. They are, of course, too aristocratic to be under the rule of the ordinary beggar chief.

In Nankin there is quite a select company of them, the order having been instituted as far back as the Ming dynasty. Hung Wu, the founder of the Ming dynasty, was once a beggar himself. The rise from beggar to emperor probably beats the record of any dynasty in Europe. In pious remembrance of his former profession Hung Wu instituted this order. At present they live in certain caves or recesses that are made in the city wall. The largest of these recesses is forty feet long by twenty feet wide; the inmates are very comfortably lodged and are decently dressed, but they are addicted to opium-smoking.

Besides seeking alms these imperial beggars go about the country and obtain a livelihood by swearing false oaths in court. Their oaths are considered as binding and sacred, so they are often much sought after, because for a few taels one can get such a beggar to swear to an oath which always decides the case. The magistrates are liable to pay the imperial beggars an allowance every year, but it is said they often forget it, as they know well that these beggars are not in want.

Ships crossing the Atlantic in the latitude of the Cape Verde Islands often encounter dust-storms of longer or shorter duration.

One of the most remarkable of these paradoxical storms swept down on the German steamer *Argentine* in the summer of 1889. It lasted for four days, during which time the air was so full of dust particles as to make high noonday almost as dark as the blackest midnight.

When the "storm" was at its height the sailors were kept busy shoveling the dust from the steamer's decks. The machinery was made to work with great difficulty, and at one time the captain had grave apprehensions that they would be dashed upon the Cape Verde reefs.

Sand-storms frequently occur on the Atlantic, but the above is the only instance of a regular dust-blizzard of four days' duration in the memory of the oldest sea-captains.

Most of the tortoise-shell used to-day in our industries is taken from the hawk's-bill turtle, captured chiefly in the Caribbean Sea. The turtles caught there vary in size from 1 foot to 4½ feet long, with a maximum weight of 150 pounds, and the average weight of shell obtained from each is from 6 pounds to 7 pounds. The commercial value of tortoise-shell depends upon the thickness and size of the plates rather than upon the brilliancy of the colors. The price of shell in the market fluctuates

from 12s. to 24s. per pound. As the best prices are obtained in England, the largest amount of the shell shipped from these parts comes to British ports. The San Blas Indians, however, trade a large amount of shell to coasting schooners, which mainly goes to America.

Mac, Topsy, Diavoleno. These are the names of about as highly educated and as jovial a trio of baboons as you may hope to encounter in the course of a year's march. They belong to Herr Grais, a German gentleman in London, who, as a trainer of wild animals, ranks second to none. Mac and Topsy are veritable wonders, the former being quite a celebrated acrobat. He can walk the tight rope as easily as he can crack a nut or tear a piece out of your tailoring; he can turn a somersault on the tight rope, and he can even undress himself without the assistance of a valet.

Topsy is no less remarkable. She makes an excellent parlor-maid. She runs away and fetches whatever articles her master may require, she skips with a hoop, and, when she is in a frolicsome mood, she imitates everything that her companion Mac is doing. As for Diavoleno, he loops the loop in really gallant style.

A few days ago a newspaper man had the pleasure of a talk with Mr. Grais on the subject of these gifted creatures.

"I have six baboons," said Mr. Grais, in reply to a query, "but three of them I keep chiefly as understudies. Now and then Mac, Topsy, or Djavoleno is off color, and one of the others appears as a substitute. Where did I obtain them? The majority were purchased from dealers, while one was brought over by a regiment of British soldiers on the termination of the war in South Africa."

"Now, what's the most difficult thing that Mac does?" asked the correspondent.

"The public imagine that the somersault on the tight rope is the most difficult feat in Mac's repertoire, but they are wrong. The cleverest item in his performance is his undressing act. This involves the exercise of his brain, whereas the somersault, extraordinary as it may be, is a matter of strength and skill. I devoted two and a half years to training old Mac. He recently celebrated his sixteenth birthday, by the bye.

"Firstly, I had to gain his confidence. When I bought him he was very wild—scared at the least thing—so I made a fuss of him, and a friendly footing having been established, I induced him, by degrees, to stand up on his hind legs. I showed him what to do, and according to the amount of bribery that was offered him he obeyed my instructions.

"After this I taught him to walk on his hind legs, holding him up a little by his fore legs to start with. All the while I encouraged him with kind words, and bribes in the shape of fruit, with the result that before long he swaggered about on two legs of his own will. You see he was anxious to be made a fuss of, and also to have an extra supply of fruit. Following this he was put to jumping. To commence with, the bars he had to leap over were very low, but their height was gradually increased until he was capable of a really high jump.

"An infinitely more serious problem," Mr. Grais continued, "was getting Mac to perform his allotted tasks on the tight rope, which in the early stages of the proceedings was placed close to the ground. Prior to this he had learned to do the somersault on the floor. This entailed a lot of showing. Time after time I turned him gently over to afford him an idea of what was expected of him, and it was months ere he was able to perfect himself.

"With regard to his antics on the tight rope he was, of course, extremely nervous, to begin with. He tumbled down repeatedly. It's true he didn't hurt himself, for he had a thick carpet to alight on, but still the prospect of a fall unnerved him. However, he progressed fairly rapidly, and now he thoroughly enjoys performing a somersault on the rope."

"With respect to the undressing, Mr. Grais?"

"That was stiff work, I can tell you. It was easy enough to persuade Mac to divest himself of his coat, and he was quick in learning to unbutton his waistcoat and throw it off, but when it came to the trousers he got mixed. He didn't know which garment to tackle first; and when he had his shirt on he was hopelessly muddled. It was twelve months before he could rid himself of his four articles of attire in their proper order."

"When you take a fresh monkey in hand, Mr. Grais, doesn't he endeavor to reduce you to mince-meat?"

"Oh, no. Occasionally he goes for my hair and bites a bit out of my coat, but once he realizes that I'm his friend he's quite amiable. The monkeys that cause me the greatest trouble are those that have been ill-treated, though perhaps not wilfully so. When a monkey opens his mouth some people are apt to conclude that he's vicious and that he intends to bite, and they hit him. The probability is that he is absolutely docile. An animal who has been subjected to violence when he didn't deserve punishment is dreadfully frightened of human beings, and it is no light job to train him."

"We haven't mentioned Topsy, Mr. Grais."

"She, too, is uncommonly clever. She will bring in a tray of tea-things and set them down before me, and if I ask her to hand me a glass or a match-box or whatever there may be on an adjoining table she will do so. Her principal delight is to copy Mac, and when he performs a somersault she loves to do likewise."

"Do you consider baboons exceptionally intelligent?"

"Some are. I had one that understood nearly every word I said. Curiously enough, the bigger a baboon grows the less capable he is of head-work; all his strength seems to run to his arms and legs. You may be interested to learn that baboons are not as intelligent as dogs."

"Have your baboons ever escaped and created havoc?"

"Mac broke away one day when he was on a visit to Birmingham. He smashed two bars of his cage and bent another; after which he demolished a window, stepped on to the sill, and descended to the street by way of a rain-pipe. It was only a liberal offer of bananas that brought him back.

"I had an awkward experience in the Suez Canal when I was returning from India. It was so hot in the Red Sea that I tied the monkeys on deck, and two of them, managing to free themselves, darted up the rigging. I shouted to them to come down for all I was worth, but in vain. Then when we arrived in the Canal, fearing that they would steal ashore, I appealed to the captain of the ship for permission to mount the rigging after them. He acceded to my request after adjuring me not to break my neck, and aloft I went. One of the monkeys I soon captured, but the other fellow flew up to the top of the mast, and I was compelled to follow."

"I suppose you look upon them as pets?"

"I am almost as fond of them as I am of my own children. We have tremendous games together. They chase me about and bite me in a friendly way just as if they were little puppy dogs, but I never have them in my sitting-room. That wouldn't do. Monkeys are too mischievous for one to have them loose in the house; besides which they must, as far as possible, be kept in one temperature. They require a lot of care—so much, indeed, that I spend the greater portion of my time with them."

"How do you account for them being such wonders?"

"By my system of training and by—judicious bribery," said Mr. Grais, laughing. "I always carry some fruit in my pockets, and when an animal has done well he is rewarded. The members of my four-legged company know when their performance has been first-rate. This is proved by the fact that when they have not been in fault they wait for their reward, whereas when they've made mistakes they clear off, and don't expect a reward."

"What's their daily menu?"

"Their first meal consists of eggs beaten up in condensed milk to which salt has been added, to aid their digestion; oatmeal, boiled vegetables—turnips, carrots, onions, or potatoes; and fruit—bananas, apples, and, if they are in season, grapes. This repast is spread over the morning. Late of an afternoon they are regaled with cod-liver oil—this to warm their chests—bread and fruit; while for supper after the show, they have more condensed milk and eggs, together with bread or buns, and vegetables."

I asked Mr. Grais, finally, how his merry band of monkeys fare when they are at sea, for they are great travelers.

"As long as the water is calm they are all right," he replied, "but in rough weather they are, as a rule, frightfully ill. They won't eat anything for days, and the worst of it is, it's impossible to force food on them. If you were to attempt to do so they would struggle and struggle, and you would get no result."

AT THE BLUE SWAN.

BY GEOFFREY RANDOLPH.

Old men who remember the pine regions of Monmouth County, New Jersey, before they were gridironed by railways, will recall the old tavern which stood on the left of the sandy road half-way between Squan Beach and Farmingdale. It has long since been leveled to the earth, but two or three generations ago it was one of the most famous hostelries in that section of the State.

It was built shortly after the Revolution, and its first landlord kept it until after the War of 1812. Then, upon his death, it passed to his only son. When Uncle Tom Maxwell, as he came to be known, took charge, he was a married man, but the only child born to the couple died in infancy.

Uncle Tom was more popular among the inhabitants of the pine regions than his father had ever been. He was one of the most genial and good-natured of men, fond of jokes and amusing stories, a scant patronizer of his own bar, a bountiful provider of the guests who occasionally stopped at the inn, which received its name from the picture of a huge blue swan that had long since been washed off the creaking sign by the storms of snow, sleet, and rain that now and then howled through that lonely section.

The Blue Swan was the scene of numberless merry gatherings in the "long ago." The dances attracted the buxom maidens and their admirers for many miles, and, though there was an occasional scrap, Uncle Tom was always able to prevent it becoming anything serious. He was not known to have an enemy in the world.

He had, however, a worthless nephew, Jack Risley, who would have hung around the Blue Swan eternally, and lived off his uncle had he been permitted. As it was, he spent most of his time there, but the welcome of even so good-natured a man as Uncle Tom was sometimes worn out, and he compelled his nephew to shift for himself.

The only thing Jack Risley could be forced to do was to hire out on some coasting vessel, which occasionally took him as far south as Virginia or the Carolinas. When he returned, always without any funds, his uncle was so pleased to see him that Jack knew he was sure of support for several months. The aunt was such a meek, quiet soul that she never thought of objecting to anything done by her husband. Man and wife ran the Blue Swan without any help in the way of servants.

I must not omit to mention a noted accomplishment of Uncle Tom Maxwell; he was the most skilful checker-player in that part of the State. It was rare that any of his neighbors could gain so much as a draw against him, and, when a victory was secured, which now and then did happen—I half-suspect through carelessness or the generosity of Uncle Tom—the winner boasted of it for months.

His most determined contestant was Captain Amos Burton, who lived a mile away, and spent many an evening with the landlord at his favorite game. Captain Burton had secured perhaps a dozen "draws" in the course of several years, and Uncle Tom conceded three square victories to him. The captain never would accept odds, though often offered, but insisted that the time would come when he would prove his superiority over his antagonist.

It was in the month of August that I mounted my horse at Point Pleasant, then known as Squan Village, and set out to ride to Farmingdale. The stage ran only semiweekly, and was not due for a couple of days.

The air was blamy and pleasant, the moon was shining, and, as I was familiar with every rod of the way, I let the reins lie on my horse's neck, and gave myself up to my cigar and meditation. I counted on reaching Farmingdale by midnight, where I intended staying until morning, when I would ride to the end of my journey at Freehold.

I would no more have passed the Blue Swan without drawing rein to shake hands and chat with Uncle Tom than I would have ridden by my own home without greeting the inmates. It was about ten o'clock when I emerged into the broad open sandy space in front of the Blue Swan, with the intention of tying my horse and dismounting. While a hundred yards distant, with the end of the little hotel instead of the front toward me, I saw a man leap out of the rear door and run toward the pine woods on my left. His course brought him so near me that, in the bright moonlight, I observed his face as distinctly as if the sun were shining. He was Jack Risley, the nephew of Uncle Tom. I called to him by name, but he did not turn his head, nor seem to see me. His countenance expressed the utmost terror, and my heart misgave me that some ill had befallen his relative.

I was out of the saddle the next minute, and pushed open the door that led into the bar-room, the formality of knocking never being thought of at the Blue Swan. The old oil lamp, suspended in the center of the room, was burning brightly, revealing the small bar at one end, the quaint chairs, the few old prints on the walls, and the simple furniture with which I had been familiar for a score of years.

In the middle of the floor was the body of Uncle

Tom. He lay on his back, with arms and legs outstretched and face upturned. He had been stricken down by the blow of a poker, the frightful wound on the forehead showing that it had been inflicted by that instrument which lay a few feet from the crimsoned head. Two chairs had been overturned, but there were no other signs of a struggle.

I bent over him, and gently raised his shoulders. I saw he was faintly breathing, and poured some of his own brandy down his throat. But it was of no avail; he was at his last grasp. He muttered: "Jack—Jack—nephew Jack——" and then it was all over.

I set out to rouse his wife, but there was no answer to my calls, and a hurried search showed that Mrs. Maxwell was absent. I was alone in the house with the body.

While wondering what I ought to do, Captain Amos Burton arrived with the intention of engaging in his favorite amusement with his old friend. He lived in the direction of Farmingdale, so he had seen nothing of Jack Risley. While the captain was expressing his horror and sympathy, he told me that Mrs. Maxwell was visiting his family, and intended to stay over night.

He had hardly said this, when Borden Kenneth, a young man of about my age, came in from the direction of Squan. He had met the nephew, who, upon being hailed, darted aside into the woods without speaking.

The funeral of Uncle Tom was one of the largest ever held in that section of the country. The widow hired a neighbor to help her keep the place going, but the shock of her husband's death carried her off within a few months. The man, after a little longer trial, gave it up, and the once famous Blue Swan went to wreck and ruin. A curse seemed to rest upon it from the day of the landlord's untimely taking off.

Jack Risely was captured between Freehold and New York, whither he was hastening to engage his services on a coasting schooner. He strenuously denied being in the vicinity of the Blue Swan on the night of the murder, but when confronted by the testimony of Kenneth and myself on the witness-stand, he confessed that he had sworn to a falsehood, and told his story.

Returning from a cruise to Wilmington, North Carolina, he had landed at Barnegat. Being as usual without any money, he walked all the way to the Blue Swan, meaning to appeal to his uncle's bounty, as he had done so many times before. He arrived on the night to which I have referred and opened the back door. As he did so, he saw his relative lying on the floor of the barroom, his forehead beaten in, his face bloody, and, as he supposed, dead. The sight filled Risley with terror. He rushed from the house heedless whither he went. He had no recollection of seeing me, but had a dim memory of meeting Kenneth on the road.

When Risley's self-command came back, his mortal fear was of being accused of the murder. It was known that his relative had driven him off several times, and, as he was the only man who had ever received a sharp word from Uncle Tom, suspicion was certain to point to him. So he decided to hurry away from the country, believing no one had recognized him. Of course, if he could escape unnoticed, no suspicion could afterward attach to him.

The evidence against the prisoner was overwhelming. Indeed, his admission was looked upon as a virtual confession, of itself. The meeting of Kenneth on the highway, my identification of him as the man who ran from the rear of the building as I rode up, the words of the dying landlord, the manner of the accused—could there be any stronger proof than these that there had been a bitter quarrel between Uncle Tom and his nephew, in which the latter had done the elder to death with the iron implement?

In those days New Jersey was more famed for hanging murderers than she has been in these later times. To the amazement, however, of every one in the county, the jury disagreed. Captain Amos Burton, whom we all expected to be the most strenuous against the nephew, was the man who refused to agree with the other eleven. No arguments could move him. He insisted there was a doubt, and he would never consent to hang the scapegrace of a nephew, although admitting it was about the best use of which he could be put.

Before the next trial took place, the course of Captain Burton had produced such effect that Jack Risley was convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to State prison for twenty years, though still insisting upon his innocence.

He had served out nearly half his term, when Captain Burton fell ill and died. Among the papers which he left was found a carefully written statement of the incidents of the evening of the murder of Uncle Tom Maxwell. The captain had called about eight o'clock for the purpose of engaging in a contest of checkers. When Captain Burton left his own home, he had just concluded his evening meal at which Mrs. Maxwell was his guest.

Uncle Tom and the captain had played two games, one of which resulted in a draw, and were upon the third. To the intense delight of the visitor every move increased his certainty of victory. He was so sure of a triumph that he began chaffing his antagonist, who, as was always the case, took it in good part. At the very moment when hope seemed to be gone for Uncle Tom, he chuckled, and then, by two dexterous moves, swept off four of his opponent's kings, leaving the single remaining one so penned that it could not move in any direction without capture.

Captain Burton was so angered that he accused Uncle Tom of cheating. The landlord quietly rose from his chair, and refused to play any longer. This drove away what little self-command remained in the brain of Captain Burton, who caught up the poker and dealt the fatal blow.

Instead of being horrified by his crime, the captain coolly replaced the checkerboard behind the bar and put away the men so as to leave no signs of the game that had been in progress. He overturned the two chairs to make it look as if there was a struggle, and then deliberately went back to his own home. Remaining there some time, he concluded it would be safe to return and then report what he discovered.

Had the slightest suspicion been directed toward Captain Burton, he would have found it awkward to explain his passing back and forth between his own home and the Blue Swan that evening, but no one ever thought of accusing him, and he was not called upon, therefore, to explain anything.

The only redeeming feature in his course was that of saving, by his persistency, Jack Risley from the gallows. The man's release from imprisonment was secured, and the disgrace finally wiped from his name.

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